Sharing in the life of God : a study in participation in Christian thought

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SHARING IN THE LIFE OF GOD:
A STUDY OF PARTICIPATION IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

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by

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ABSTRACT

Participation is a notion found frequently in contemporary (especially ecumenical) theology and while some attention has been given to the notion in terms of its scriptural grounding in terms such as *koinonia*, little work has been done recently on the theological and historical development of the concept in the Christian tradition. Because the term predates Christian theology in a philosophically significant way, discussion has often turned on the issue of how far the term has been applied appropriately to the Christian context, what degree of originality the term carries within the context of Christian doctrine and what dangers there are in reverting to its usages in Classical philosophy. This thesis seeks to move this discussion on, tracing the development of the notion of 'participation' from Plato to the present-day, not by way of an exhaustive historical survey, but by way of particular theologians whose (not always fully conscious) use of the term participation develops and clarifies an understanding of that term and which flags up some of the theological strengths and weaknesses of using such a notion. Consideration of participation demands that a whole host of inter-related theological issues are addressed and this leads in the course of this study to reflection on a number of key issues in Christian theology such as otherness, relationship, freedom, causality and 'sharing in the life of God'.

While a definitive, problem-free account of participation remains to be realised, the thesis explores an understanding of participation in terms of an entering into the relations of the Trinitarian persons in a manner appropriate to human creatureliness. Some of the main challenges which confront those theologians seeking to formulate a doctrine of participation in the late twentieth century in this way are illustrated and tentative proposals for ways forward are offered.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In common usage the verb 'participate' means, according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, to have a share in, to take part, *in* a thing and/or *with* a person; or to have something *of*. The Latin term means to take part (*partem capere*) or to have part (*partem habere*); so if something obtains a part of that which is or which rightly belongs to another, it might be said to participate in that other. In common parlance participation can involve relations pertaining to groups of people, groups with common aims, objectives, experiences, feelings and so on. For example to "take part" can involve membership of a team, entering a discussion or feeling another's joy. Participation can involve all kinds of objects spanning the physical to the moral, the scientific to the theological, the rational to the emotional. Indeed it might be said that participation is the broadest and most effective term to express the relation of the whole person to reality in its manifold dimensions: physical, moral, cognitive, artistic, sociological, economic, and so on. The meaning of participation varies with the nature of that which is participated; so for example to participate in a quantitative 'something' may involve a sharing out of a whole into its parts, while participation in another's joy is more about a correspondent responsiveness to the "whole" which remains intact and undivided. Plato used the term participation (*methexis*) to explain the relationship of particular cases to general Forms, so that for instance 'Susannah is good' could be understood as 'Susannah participates in the Form of the Good'. This way of using participation to explain the relation of the One and the Many in terms of dependence and vertical structure has tended to dominate philosophical and theological discussions of the term 'participation' and as a result the different nuances and developments in understandings of participation in the Christian tradition have often been overlooked. Within the New Testament itself we see a development of the term which focuses on the dependence of the creature on the Creator and the integral nature of relations with other participants in participating in aspects of the divine.

Our objective in this discussion is to trace the development of the notions of 'participation' from Plato to the present-day, not by way of an exhaustive historical survey[1], but by way of particular theologians whose (not always fully

[1] For example space considerations mean that we will only skirt the notion of 'participation' in Eastern Orthodox thought, despite its frequent and persistent presence in the historical development of that theological tradition.

conscious) use of the conceptualities of participation develops and clarifies understandings of that notion and which flags up some of the theological implications and difficulties of using such a notion. Seen from the perspective of this term a whole host of inter-related theological issues require analysis and this will allow us to consider some wider issues in doctrinal theology and give some broad brush-strokes towards a coherent, consistent picture of human beings' relationship with the Godhead. While a definitive, problem-free account of participation remains to be realised, we would hope to illustrate the main challenges which confront those theologians seeking to formulate a doctrine of participation in the late twentieth century and suggestions for ways forward.

The notion 'participation' has been fixed upon rather than 'communion', 'obedience', 'faithfulness' or other possibilities for a number of reasons. Firstly, the history of the notion predates Christian theology in a philosophically significant way and this raises the issue of how far the notion has appropriately been applied to the Christian context, what degree of originality the notion carries within the context of Christian doctrine and what dangers there are in reverting to its usages in Classical philosophy. Secondly, while the notion might appear to have only a slight scriptural basis, related terms such as *koinonia* reveal wider associations and an understanding of the scriptural usage of participation and associated terms will reveal pointers to defensible contemporary understandings of the term. Thirdly, the notion captures the sense and priority of relationship with God without separating that relationship from inter-human relationships, and it is a useful window through which to explore how the nature of human beings' relationships to God and one another are jointly conceived. In particular the notion has been associated with disputes concerning the ontological nature of relationship with God and we shall argue from our analysis that it is vital that a clear ontology of relationship is elucidated if a coherent understanding of human beings' relationship to God is to be presented. Fourthly and relatedly, participation has been used particularly where relationships with the Triune God are being expounded, and we shall reflect upon how we can conceive of participation 'in the Trinity', 'in the divine life' and in 'the intra-trinitarian relationships'. In this context it should be noted from the outset that our theological sympathies lie with a Trinitarian understanding of God. Having said this, our thesis does not begin with God rather than human beings, nor vice versa, but seeks a dialectic interplay

between both the ascending and descending routes to divine-human relationships. Fifthly, the notion has featured in recent theology as well as repeatedly in the theological development of Christianity and a modern in-depth study of the notion is still lacking.[2] Sixthly, focusing on participation will enable us to raise a number of concerns associated with key contemporary theological concepts of interest such as otherness, relationship, freedom and causality. Seventhly, as a particularly common way of translating the ecumenically popular term *koinonia*, analysis of the notion may contribute to ecumenical discussions, helping the debate to move beyond assertions of the biblical grounding of concepts such as *koinonia* and listings of the means of *koinonia* (such as the sacraments) towards an explanation of how *koinonia* is effected, what ontology might underpin such conceptuality, how we might understand key theological terms in this context, and so on.[3] Our analysis will also contribute to such discussions in helping to fill out parts of the theological history of participation in the Christian tradition from the time of the early Fathers to the twentieth century, a history largely (and perhaps fearfully?) neglected in contemporary ecumenical dialogues focusing on *koinonia*.

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[2] W.Jeanrond, speaking of the precious nature of Trinitarian language, argues that the mysterious nature of God is "a mystery which is inviting and open to everybody eager to participate in relational praxis (of love)". See his 'The Question of God Today' in *The Christian Understanding of God Today*, (Dublin: Columba Press,1994). Robert Jenson, writing recently of Luther's thought, suggests in conclusion that "Human freedom, in the only sense Luther wants to talk about, is nothing less than Participation in God's own triune rapture of freedom". See his 'An Ontology of Freedom in the *De Servo Arbitrio* of Luther', *Modern Theology*, Vol. 10, no.3 (July 1994), p.252. These and other theologians often draw in the notion of participation in ways suggestive of its importance, yet explanations of the notion are either absent or so tantalisingly brief as to leave readers none the wiser.

[3] See S.Wood's "Ecclesial *Koinonia* in Ecumenical Dialogues" for a useful survey of what different churches mean by *koinonia*, *One in Christ* (vol. 30, no.2, 1994),124-45

2. PARTICIPATION IN GREEK THOUGHT AND THE SCRIPTURES

We shall first look to Plato to explore the understanding and use of the term 'participation' because he provides a philosophical outlook which rests heavily on the concept and because the Platonic perspective has been uniquely suggestive and influential in various ways on Christian thought.

2.1 The Theory of Forms

Central to Plato's philosophy is his conception of Forms (or Ideas, see *Euthyphro* 5d and 6d), whose postulated existence provided Plato with the means of answering such questions as 'what is Justice?' and 'what is the Beautiful?' In discussing Beauty for example, Plato speaking through Socrates can say "It seems to me that whatever else is beautiful apart from absolute beauty is beautiful because it partakes of that absolute beauty, and for no other reason."[1] Further, "the reason why other things are called after the forms is that they participate in the forms."[2] Thus Plato explains how it is that diverse realities in the world are unified by having a 'share' in the Forms. For Plato the world of Forms, unchanging, unified and alone truly "real" contrasts with the world of sense, ever in flux and perpetual change. Connected with this contrast is a distinction between knowledge (which pertains to reality) and sense-perception or mere opinion. For Plato knowledge cannot rest on the shifting sands of sense-perception, but must have its foundation in the immutable, reliable, eternal world of Forms. Awakening to knowledge of reality (i.e. the world of Forms) is most memorably expressed by Plato in his illustration of prisoners languishing in the dark in *The Republic* (*Republic* VII, 514a ff). Initially the prisoners can see anything of themselves or of one another only through shadows cast on the wall by fire behind them, and ignorantly they suppose this to be reality. Upon release, a prisoner turns to be dazzled by the light, and as he is drawn out of the cave into the sunlight and becomes accustomed to the light he begins to realise that what previously he took to be real was in fact shadow and illusion, and he gazes upon the true reality. The movement from darkness to light represents the soul's ascension to the intelligible realm and contemplation of that realm. In this allegory the sun represents the Form of the

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1 *Phaedo* 100c.

2 Ibid., 102b.

Good, the source of reality and value for the rest of the universe.

We are awakened to a sense of true reality and we orient ourselves to this reality as we purify ourselves (e.g. *Phaedo* 65e-66a). Such purification has both a moral and an intellectual aspect. Moral purification entails disciplining the body so that it is not a hindrance to the soul in its task of contemplating true reality. Intellectual purification has two elements, the abstract and the passionate. By the study of such abstract subjects as Mathematics (e.g. *Republic* VI, 510c ff) and dialectics (as the search for the essence of things, e.g. *Republic* VII, 534b) the soul is being trained for contemplation, because the soul is confining its attention to non-sensory objects, which Plato took to be true reality (cf. *Phaedo* 66c). But as Louth points out, this abstract and somewhat austere way of purification is fused with passion.[3] So in *The Symposium* Diotima speaks of longing and devotion towards the one single Form of Beauty which lies behind the passion and love of particular beautiful objects (*Symposium* 210a ff). In *The Symposium* the soul is purified and ascends by way of love, the soul's devotion leading eventually to that final contemplation of universal beauty or beauty in itself, the eternal, ineffable Form of Beauty. The kind of knowledge associated with participation here is knowledge by acquaintance which includes propositional elements; true knowledge implies and involves actualisation so that for example to participate truly in the Form of courage entails knowing about courage *and* being governed in one's actions by courage. In relation to this it is noteworthy that Plato often has Socrates saying that virtue is knowledge (e.g. *Protagoras* 352c)[4]

Looking more closely at the Forms themselves, it is clear that, at least in the early and middle dialogues, Plato sees Forms as having at times a causal[5] relation to those particulars which participate in them (see for example *Phaedo* 100c4-6). Indeed participation in a given Form F is the only cause of a given

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[3] A.Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition* (Oxford: OUP, 1981), p.9

[4] Plato appears not to have distinguished propositional knowledge and knowledge by acquaintance; indeed in setting out a theory of knowledge that would hold for all kinds of knowledge Plato gives the example of knowing a road in *Meno* 97a ff., an example of knowledge by acquaintance.

[5] G.Vlastos notes that the Greek word is *aitiai* and that there are certain problems in translating the term as 'cause' if by this we mean simply efficient cause. At times 'reason' may be a more appropriate translation. See *Plato I: Metaphysics and Epistemology* ed. G.Vlastos (New York: Anchor, 1971) pp.132-66.

thing's being or becoming F; so Socrates can state that there is "no other cause for the coming into being of two than participation in duality, and that whatever is to become two must participate in this, and whatever is to become one must participate in unity".[6] It is worth noting an ambiguity in Plato's thought at this point. It is unclear whether Forms function as *efficient* or *final* causes for Plato. As Prior points out "the description of the causal role of the Forms given in this passage (i.e. *Phaedo* 101c) fits rather well with the conception of the Forms as efficient causes, but some of the things Plato has to say earlier in the dialogue (74d-75b...) about phenomena 'striving to be like' the Forms suggests that they are final causes."[7] It may be that Plato had different types of causality in mind at different moments but saw no difficulty in reconciling them. Indeed the distinctions between different types of cause is first seriously reflected upon only later in Greek thought by Aristotle; perhaps such distinctions had not occurred to Plato.

Not only are Forms described by Plato in the early and middle dialogues in a manner which suggests they are immanent in things; he describes them also as *paradeigmata* , 'paradigms' (see e.g. *Parmenides* 132c-d). Forms are somehow 'standards' telling us what it is for particular things to partake of the respective Forms. Prior argues, persuasively in our view, for seeing paradigm or standard as not meaning that the Form is itself an exemplar, but something exemplified, a general pattern[8] (like for example a colour). Thus in regarding Forms as paradigms Plato does not mean that Forms are exemplars of themselves but that they are patterns shared in some way by things that exemplify them.

Finally here we might note the separation which Plato points out at times between Forms and phenomena. Plato's famous allegory of the sun and cave illustrates the separation of the intelligible and sensible world (cf. *Republic* 507a ff); in the *Phaedrus* the world of Forms is located in 'that place beyond the heavens' (*Phaedrus* 247c); and in the *Phaedo* only it seems when the intellect is separated from the body, as when at death the soul separates from the body, is the soul able to "leave this world" (*Phaedo* 61e). While we should

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[6] *Phaedo* 101c

[7] W.J.Prior, *Unity and Development in Plato's Metaphysics* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p.14.

[8] Ibid., p.18ff.

not interpret such metaphors in a crudely literalistic way, it does seem that Plato is suggesting a *transcendent* nature to the Forms, motivated no doubt at times by the wish not to see them soiled by too close a contact with the transient, mutable phenomenal world - contact which would undermine their function as objects of enduring and sure knowledge. (There is a tension in Plato's thought here, because at other times he wishes to stress the immanent nature of the Forms and the way in which the notion of participation affords a real relationship between Forms and particulars).

2.2 Participation in the Forms

Because Forms exert a causal influence on phenomena in some sense, Plato required a description of the relation between Form and phenomena, and he found this in the concept of 'participation' (*methexis*). Unfortunately Plato nowhere provides a direct explanation of this concept, but two different aspects of his understanding can be indirectly discerned.[9] Participation is sometimes regarded as 'sharing' or 'communion', relating to *metalambanein* (to partake of or literally to have a share in) and *metechein* (to have a share in). Such a view suggests the Form is where its participants are and that it is immanent in them. The problem with this understanding is that it might suggest that the Forms are somehow split up between the participants. A second conception of participation in defence of the Forms is that of resemblance or imaging. Socrates states "the best I can make of the matter is this - that these Forms are as it were patterns fixed in the nature of things. The other things are made in their image and are likenesses, and this participation they come to have in the Forms is nothing but their being made in their image" (*Parmenides* 132d).

In making this suggestion Socrates does not seem to answer Parmenides' most damaging argument against the theory of Forms, namely that the theory of Forms results in an infinite vicious regress[10] - Parmenides' famous 'Third Man

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9 We are indebted here to the analysis of Prior, *Unity and Development in Plato's Metaphysics*, pp.37-45.

10 Briefly, if x is F and F-ness is itself F then x and F-ness have a common characteristic. Take x, F-ness and this characteristic together and it seems that we require a fourth 'Form' to account for the resemblance between the first three, and so on. This argument produces an indefinite number of Forms and undermines claims (of Plato's middle-period at least) that the Form of each general characteristic is unique.

Argument (TMA). Without entering into the details of the TMA we should note that it can be consistently formulated[11] *if* it is assumed that Plato was committed to the non-identity assumption (if x is F, x cannot be identical with F-ness) and the self-predication assumption (F-ness is itself F). Plato's commitment to such assumptions is by no means clear however. Concerning the self-predication assumption for example, while remarks concerning certain Forms suggest they are genuinely self-predicative (e.g. the Form of Beauty; cf. *Symposium* 210e-211b, *Phaedo* 100c), elsewhere Plato appears to reject this assumption (as in the 'Third Bed Argument' in *Republic* X). Allen points out that there is no need to assume that Form and particular belong to the same category of realities and the fact that the Form causes the particular makes it unlikely that Form and particular do exist on the same level or in the same way. Giving the example of a red scarf reflected in a mirror Allen notes the reflection is "not similar in *kind* to the original"[12] and that in calling the reflection red "you cannot mean the *same* thing you mean when you call its original red"[13] . To do so would be to say that both Form and particular share a common quality (redness) and as Allen succinctly puts it "the reflection does not *resemble* the original; rather it is a *resemblance of* the original"[14]

A second version of the TMA is used to attack not only the theory of Forms generally, but particularly the understanding of Forms as paradigms and Socrates' suggestion of participation as resemblance. But the second TMA also requires that the resemblance relation between Form and phenomenon implies the sharing of a common property. However, as Prior points out, this assumption is not necessarily valid:[15]

Plato seems to ground the possession of a property by an object (e.g. the property of being beautiful) in the relation between that object and a Form (in this case the Form of Beauty), rather

11 See for example W.Sellars 'Vlastos and "The Third Man"' in *Philosophical Review* 64 (1955), 405-37

12 R.E.Allen, 'Participation and Predication in Plato's Middle Dialogues' in his *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p.50.

13 Allen, ibid., p.50. However the issue of language comes to the fore here because "it leaves open the vexing question of precisely *how* the redness of scarf and image are one: is there not a rather formidable problem in suggesting that 'red' means something *quite* different when applied to each in turn?" In R.Williams' *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: DLT, 1987), p.217.

14 Allen, ibid., p.50. Form and particular do not stand under the same concepts (like redness) in the way in which say red scarves and red ties stand under redness, there is rather a relation of the dependent to the independent present, the particular being a *relational entity*, defined by its relation to the Form.

15 Prior, *Unity and Development in Plato's Metaphysics*, p.39-40.

than grounding participation in the common possession of a property. In other words, common properties are for Plato derivative entities, not primary ones; the relation of participation...is basic. If this is so, any attempt to ground participation in the sharing of a property would inevitably distort Plato's own intentions, as well as producing a vicious circularity (first we explain common properties in terms of resemblance, then we explain resemblance in terms of common properties).[16]

The two aspects of Plato's understanding of participation mentioned earlier parallel Plato's view of the Forms as immanent and transcendent; the understanding of participation as 'sharing in' lending itself more to the understanding of Forms as immanent, the understanding of resemblance being more appropriate when the transcendence of the Forms is to the fore. The tension between understanding the Forms as immanent and transcendent is brought to light by Parmenides in his 'Two Worlds' argument, an argument questioning the very possibility of participation. While Plato may have been aware of some if not all of the errors in Parmenides' argument at this point, it does seem that the thrusts of the argument - that there is a conflict between the immanence and the transcendence of the Forms and that the threat of an utter divorce of the world of phenomena and the world of Forms looms large - are possibilities which Plato takes seriously. Behind this, there is the threat that the two kinds of participation Plato envisages must reduce to one or the other and, more radically, that no notion of participation is adequate to spanning the gulf between phenomena and Forms which must remain forever separate.

Plato does not adequately answer the questions raised by the 'Two Worlds' argument in *Parmenides.* However, in the *Timaeus* , while Plato maintains the distinction between the concrete, spatial phenomenal world and the abstract, non-spatial world of Forms, he suggests a new understanding of the causal nature of the Forms which helps address the 'Two Worlds' argument (*assuming* the *Timaeus* is a later work than *Parmenides.*) Plato introduces the idea of the craftsman, creator or demiurge who, working from the Forms as patterns or paradigms, creates copies of them in the phenomenal world from a preexistent chaos (*Timaeus* 28a-29c). So the Demiurge provides the necessary link between the world of Forms and that of phenomena, and is the agent that moulds this world in the image of the Forms. The Demiurge is the efficient cause of the resemblance of phenomena to their Forms, so that while the Forms

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16 Prior, *Unity and Development in Plato's Metaphysics,* p.50, n.38. See also his 'Parmenides 132c-133a and the Development of Plato's Thought', *Phronesis* 24 (1979), 230-40

continue to provide patterns for the phenomenal world, their immanence is removed. In this way Plato appears to make some rejoinder to the 'Two Worlds' argument.

Interestingly, while Plato continues to speak of the Form-phenomenon relationship as one of imaging or resemblance in the *Timaeus*, he does not speak of this relationship of imaging as one of participation. Further, after *Parmenides* , Plato does not discuss the concept of participation closely, nor does he offer a definition of it. Whether this is due to the force of the arguments in the *Parmenides* is a moot point but *assuming* Plato's continued allegiance to the theory of Forms in his later dialogues and if, as we would suggest, some of the points made in the *Timaeus* indirectly respond to arguments from *Parmenides*, it seems that Plato's silence on the matter is best taken not as a sign of his diffidence concerning participation but rather as suggesting he views the concept as in some way beyond explanation, as primitive and fundamental in his metaphysical scheme.

One more point concerning Plato's discussion of participation should be made before moving on, namely that Plato does not always restrict the relation of participation to that between Form and phenomenon but in the later dialogue the *Sophist* considers the Forms participating in one another. By using participation in describing some of the relations between the Forms, Plato seems not to be restricting that relation to cases where the two entities in the relationship belong to ontologically different realms. Yet Plato's main illustration of participation, that of imaging or resemblance has been used in earlier dialogues in the context of the image belonging to a different and inferior order of reality from the original.[17] If such an illustration can no longer help Plato explain what he understands by participation, which it seems it cannot where participation of the Forms in other Forms is under consideration, then the concept of participation is more in need of explanation than ever; if Plato was aware of such difficulties, then nevertheless they were left unresolved.

2.3 Causality

Another issue of interest in relation to participation in Plato is causality and what place, if any, there is for the participant's activity in coming to participate in the

[17] Only in the *Parmenides* is the resemblance relation actually offered as a way of understanding participation of course, though the relation is mentioned frequently in the *Timaeus*.

Form. Plato's comments on the role of intellect and passion leave us in no doubt that there is a role for the participant to play but this being the case, Plato needs a suitably nuanced conception of the Form's causality to allow for this. Unfortunately Plato does not provide us with such a conception in the writings we have of his. The issue is sharpened by the fact that for Plato, the Supreme Being of the Republic is somehow 'outside' of the realm of being and undetermined by that realm. But in that case the reason of Greek philosophy would have been unable to grasp it, because such reasoning since Parmenides assumed that only what was could be thought of or intellectually perceived. Plato spoke vaguely of that final state of the philosopher which was achieved through sudden illumination, a state which cannot be forced by intellectual achievement or desire. But if, as implied, the Supreme Being was able to cause such sudden illumination at this stage, then why not at any stage in our intellectual journey? If it was because the Supreme Being waited on our achieving a certain stage then it does seem that we can force the issue through our abilities and if not then what is to stop the Supreme Being's causing our participation in the Good at whatever point in our development? Part of the difficulty for Plato is reconciling our activity with the inscrutable influence of the Good, and impersonal conceptions of cause fail to resolve the issue satisfactorily.

Closely related to the theme of the participant's actions is the initial and developing movement towards the Forms. Is this caused by the respective Form or do we play a part? Recalling Plato's allegory of the prisoners in the cave it seems that the Form initiates a response (the prisoner being released) and the prisoner is drawn out by the Form through his intellectual efforts, aesthetic desire and passionate longing, moral purification enhancing and enabling the process. But if the initial cause is not to be coercive there must be a sense in which the prisoner turns his mind freely to the light, an act or decision which is hardly simply a cognitive effort. Rather it is an act of *will*. And it is here that the limits of Platonic philosophy become apparent because, as Dihle points out in his study of the theory of will in Classical Antiquity[18], such a notion of will on the part of human beings was conspicuously absent. (Michael Foster argued in a not dissimilar way that "the failure of Greek ethics to achieve a notion of will was

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18 A.Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (California: Uni. of Calif. Press, 1982).

a necessary consequence of Greek metaphysics..."[19]). The impersonal, logical-type nature of the Form's causality undermines the very possibility of a mode of *personal* causation which gives room both to a sovereign, initiating, willing God and the respondent, willing freedom of the human being. If God's causality is understood as the personal willing of a Creator then we at least stand more chance of retaining the creature's integrity and contingent autonomy than we do with Plato's scheme.

2.4 Plato's Bequest

Much as Plato's thought on participation remains under-developed and opaque, there are some key issues raised by his use of the term. As an attempt to express the relation between Form and particular, the type of causality and resemblance described by the relation require elaboration, as does the ontological framework and the way in which the aspects of transcendence and immanence are retained. Linguistic issues concerning participation are also raised by Plato's account; if a particular participates in a Form F then how are we to understand their community of character? Problems result from univocal and equivocal interpretations and Plato's own concerns to protect the imitation model from oversimplification (in terms of the image merely imperfectly reflecting the glory of the Archetype or being 'like' the archetype but only to a lesser degree)[20] suggest the need to examine linguistic descriptions of community of character expressed in the notion of participation. Some of Plato's own remarks can lead to a univocal understanding of Form and particular bearing the same name in the same sense. Recalling our intellectual development whereby we ascend the hierarchy of reality, gradually we perceive the Forms and that in virtue of which they exist finally, the Form of the Good. But implicit in this is the fact that the Good is a case (albeit a special

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[19] See his *The Political Philosophies of Plato and Hegel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p.131 Foster goes on to argue that the Christian doctrine of creation provides a basis for the notion of a divine, personal will (Rev. 4:11), cf. pp.191f. One might wonder whether Plato was not fumbling for such a conception with his introduction of the Demiurge in his middle period.

[20] "If this interpretation is accepted, it is quite fatal. But it turns on construing the deficiency of particulars as one of quality, rather than of type; they are deficiently something else *of the same sort*, ... yet surely the force of the metaphor of imitation ... is to indicate that the deficiency in question is that of one *type* of thing with respect to something of another type". Allen, *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, p.52. So when Plato speaks of the particular being 'deficient' in degree of reality relative to the Form "'deficiency' is here a category distinction, not a distinction within categories", ibid., p.52

case) of intelligible reality. This can lead to seeing the Good, or God, participated in by the Forms in a manner comparable to the participation of the particulars in the Forms, and the intelligible world being seen as an imitation or image of the first principle. Williams notes that this is what happened with the likes of Middle Platonists such as Numenius and Plutarch and such thinking catalysed a revision of 'participation' in terms of 'procession' by Neoplatonists such as Plotinus and Porphyry:

> the lower reality is constituted or formed in this or that respect by the active life of the higher, but *does not reproduce the 'essence' of the higher*; there is no question of univocity between Form and particular, or of the Form perfectly exemplifying what the particular imperfectly exemplifies.[21]

Given the hierarchical structure we find in Middle Platonism, it is unsurprising that participation was used "to express not only the relationship between the intelligible and sensible worlds, but also more generally the relation of any lower to any higher degree of reality".[22] Such a trend can be seen in the thought of Plotinus, who stands not only as a philosopher influenced by Middle Platonism but as the thinker most closely associated with Neoplatonism.

2.5 Neoplatonic Participation

Plotinus' emphatically vertical model of reality may seem to sharpen Plato's tendency to view progress as flight from this world (e.g. *Theatetus* 176B) especially given Plotinus' understanding of evil as the absence of structure, life and consciousness such as is embraced more the further from the One[23] reality is. Even so just as Plato can have at times a positive view on creation (e.g. *Timaeus* 90 A-D) so too in his anti-Gnostic polemics Plotinus asserts

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[21] Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, p.220. Williams goes on " the relation is a .. kind of equivocity recognized by Porphyry: a can be called f because some aspect of its existence can be understood by reference to a central or normative fact of something being f; but a's f-ness is not itself a *case* of f that can stand alongside the normative f. Thus the agency of Form goes out from its own reality not to produce imitations of itself but to cause certain related and purposive activities in a lower reality. There is not and cannot be any question of participation between Form and particular in the sense of their simply exhibiting a common structure in different degrees. Plato's own misgivings about an oversimple 'imitation' doctrine in respect of Forms and particulars are here pressed to a radical conclusion", p.220

[22] Balas, D.L., *Μετουσια Θεου. Man's Participation in God's Perfections according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa* (Rome: I.B.C. Libreria Herder,1966), p.4

[23] Plotinus heads up his metaphysical hierarchy with the absolutely negative One of the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* . He identifies this One with the absolute good of *The Republic* (509b, cf *Enneads* V, 1,8).

energetically that "the descent of the spirit into matter is not only the cause of evil, but primarily the origin of the ordered, animated, and beautiful universe".[24] It seems that individual beings are free to turn away from the One and so become morally and physically corrupt and in Plotinus we see voluntaristic elements entering the framework which have inevitable ramifications for participation in his thought. It is the fact of the inexplicable longing to be creative which provides the rationale for the procession through various levels of reality beginning with the One. Further, the refusal to turn back to one's origin can be described only in terms of volition finally, "though the act of turning is undoubtedly realised as a poor intellectual performance of the being in question".[25] Although 'will' is not considered in Plotinus (or in his biographer Porphyry) in terms of an anthropological category separate from that of the intellect, there is an awareness here of the freedom with which would-be participants in the intelligible realm can embrace that realm or otherwise. Thus while reflection on the activity of participants in that which is participated begins in Plotinus to take on much more of a voluntaristic dimension than in Plato, the movement is not sufficiently self-conscious for it to equate with 'modern' notions of free-will.

Plotinus points out that the *anima mundi* participates in both the intelligible and the sensible world (cf. *Enneads* IV, 8,7; V,1,7 etc.), its inadequate contemplation of *nous*[26] having Nature as its product. But Plotinus tends to focus participation more on the purely intelligible world, between the souls and *nous* or between *nous* and the One. In this context participation concerns the relation of a lower level of reality to a higher one, and, it should be noted, lacks any understanding of participation as involving <u>both</u> 'horizontal' (e.g. inter-human) and 'vertical' aspects.

The fact that union with the One involves the cessation of noetic activity raises questions concerning the possibility of language about the One. Participation of the *nous* in the One and our progressive intellectual grasp of the*nous* might suggest we do have some legitimate claim to talk concerning the One, but in

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24 A.Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*, p.114.

25 Ibid., p.115.

26 For Plotinus *nous* is the act, image and imitation of the One, being above all things except the One, contemplating the One and cogitating the multiplicity of intelligent beings or Ideas which we find in the world.

Plotinus' thought the *nous* emerges from the One as totally other than the One (e.g. being self-conscious the *nous* is essentially dyadic) and the closer the *nous* approximates to the One, the less can be said. Such epistemological humility concerning the first principle was unlikely to satisfy many Greek philosophers, never mind most Christian thinkers. Proclus is a case in point.

In Proclus and in later Neoplatonism in general we continue to find 'participation' used as an explanation of relations holding between different levels of reality, and the dependence of lower on higher levels. Proclus understands the relation between higher beings and lower ones in terms of bestowal (*metadosis*, in Proclus' Elements of Theology (*El. theol.*), 18), while relations between lower beings and higher ones are described as 'participation' (*methexis*, *metousia*, *metechein*, cf. *El. theol.* 1,2,3 etc.). Following Plotinus' idea of production due to giving superabundantly and without diminishment, Proclus sees no loss in the producer which produces 'secondary existences' (as Dodds translates the term[27]); neither will he countenance the idea of a parcelling out of the producer among its participants (*El. theol.* 27). The produced being bears a likeness to that which produced it, although it is inferior to it, and the higher or lower point occupied by produced beings in the hierarchical scale reflects the degree of original perfection and unity of the respective beings (cf. *El. theol.* 36).

Proclus attempts to reconcile the immanence and transcendence of Forms by multiplying the entities involved, a procedure typical of his methodology; "For on the one hand the unparticipated, having the relative status of a monad (as being its own and not another's, and as transcending the participants), generates terms capable of being participated" (*El. theol.* 23). Thus that which is participated in is the 'immanent universal', while the 'transcendent universal' is strictly 'unparticipated' (*amethekton*). Indeed every order has its beginning in the unparticipated monad, deriving from which there are manifolds which may be participated in by participants (see *El. theol.* 14-24). Thus each order of reality can be understood by reference to the distinction between the 'participant', the 'participated' and the 'unparticipated'. Dodds points out that Plotinus "shrinks from calling the transcendent term *amethekton* (cf. esp.

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[27] Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, trans. and ed. E.R.Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933), p.31

Enneads VI.5.3) though it is *ameriston* and *apathes* - his mystical sense of the universe as the expression of a single divine force made the sharper distinction impossible for him".[28] It might be argued that Plotinus also wished to avoid inconsistency, but despite having said in *El. theol.* 1 that "*pan plethos metechei pe tou enos*" Proclus is not being inconsistent in his analysis, provided we understand that "a term which is *proprie amethekton* is yet indirectly *methekton* through the *metechomena* which it generates (cf. *El. theol.* 56)".[29] For our purposes it is unnecessary to go further into the elaborate and difficult scheme which is implied by Proclus' comments on the hierarchy of participation[30], having noted the role the term plays in expressing the (dependent) relation between lower and higher levels of reality, and having noted the triadic structure undergirding each grade of reality (the unparticipated, the participated and the participant). Proclus wishes to bridge the gap between the first principle and its emanations in a manner which can retain something of the qualitative difference and supremacy of the first principle but which yet affords some epistemological access to that principle. He bridges the gap to his own satisfaction with his notion of participated and unparticipated aspects of the first principle. The latter generates the former but participation in the former does not imply any access to the latter. However because they are related, the immanent universal indicates *something* of the nature of the (unparticipated) transcendent universal. Lurking behind this thinking may well be the axioms that God's substance is unparticipated and that no substance can be part of another substance. In this case a lower substance can be 'generated' by a higher substance's agency but in what sense the lower substance participates in the higher is questionable. Clearly there can be no *essential* participation if the axioms hold but if the participant only participates in that which is accidental to the higher substance, then in what sense does the participant participate truly *in the higher substance*? And in what sense is there epistemological access to the first principle and how is language concerning the first principle justified? These problems are not peculiar to the esoteric discussions of Greek philosophers, and as we shall see some early debates among Christians centred around such issues.

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28 Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, p.211

29 Ibid., p.211

30 Ibid., pp.211-212 , 237 and 282 for a more detailed consideration.

2.6 The Old Testament

A. Raymond George claims that there is little of relevance to the theme of 'participation' in the Old Testament[31] and he notes only three relatively insignificant uses of the term *koinonia* in the LXX.[32] However, while it may be true that out of Jewish piety and a sense of God's transcendence a certain self-restraint and caution was exercised in use of the term, the O.T. does provide fertile ground for later thinkers (and in particular Paul) to develop a notion of participation, particularly through the Hebraic notion of a basic human solidarity among the sons of Adam. This notion entailed an understanding of the individual as a representative as well as a constitutive member of his group, an understanding marked by a certain "fluidity of reference, facilitating rapid and unmarked transition from the one to the many, and from the many to the one".[33] As individuals Israelites shared in the identity of Israel in a sense and lines of thought such as this may well have been built on by Paul in his construction of an understanding of participation. However we shall see that Paul radically adapts this fundamental communitarian awareness in *including* Yahweh within this community, as the author and focus of the community of the faithful, who are gathered in communion with one another and God. Thus (as we shall see) participation will become in part a sharing with other believers in that which is of God in Paul's thought.

2.7 The New Testament

The most familiar passage concerning participation is found at 2 Peter 1:4, where it is stated that through power and knowledge of Christ and his promises "you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature (*theias koinonoi phuseos*)" (RSV). The word partaker translates the Greek word whose root is κοινων- here, alerting us to the relevance of such words as *koinonia*, *koinonos* and *koinoneo*

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31 A.Raymond George, *Communion With God in the New Testament* (London:Epworth, 1953), p.134.

32 Namely Lev. 5:21, Wisd. 8:18, 3 Mac. 4:6. Other κοινων– words are rare in the Septuagint, regularly representing the Hebraic root chabar. This Hebraic term can give rise to expressions such as 'join', 'unite' or 'bind together' and often refers to human partnerships (such as the partnership between worshippers of Psalm 119:63).

33 H.W.Robinson, "The Hebrew Concept of Corporate Personality" in ZAW 66 (1936), p.50

in our study of the word 'participation'. It might be argued that the word 'communion' is more appropriate to such Greek terms, and perhaps such a translation is more appropriate where a certain mutuality or shared activity is indicated. However we must allow the context to dictate how we translate such terms, and 2 Peter 1:4 is a typical case where 'partaker' is the more apposite translation. Indeed as Campbell's study of *koinonia* points out, that word's primary and common meaning is to share in something (genitive) with someone (dative), i.e. participation along with others in something (or someone).[34] Moule also points out that:

> *Koinonia* is sometimes referred to carelessly by modern writers as though it were a concrete noun meaning '(the Christian) fellowship'. But the debate over this from the time of C.A.Anderson Scott onwards ought to make it clear that it is normally an abstract noun meaning 'participation', and, as such, plays an important part in the expression of the religious experience of contact with God.[35]

Given these findings, the scope of our study of 'participation' in the N.T. is widened considerably, because we must take into account those words rooted by κοινων– in the N.T. and their various contexts, as well as terms such as *metoche, metochos* and *metecho.*

2.8 Paul's notion of Participation

One important usage of words related to the root κοινων– is that denoting a joint relationship to something which is of God, be it grace, the Gospel, the Spirit, Christ's sufferings, Christ's Body and Blood. However other uses of the word can be found in Paul's letters; for example at Rom. 15:26-27 *koinonia* is to be understood as "collection" and at Gal. 2:9 perhaps means simply "community".

Participation in the Platonic and Neoplatonic understanding of the word has, as we have seen, tended to focus on the individual's participation. With Paul

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[34] J.Y.Campbell, *Three New Testament Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1965). See also H.Seesemann, *Der Begriff* KOINΩNIA *im Neuen Testament* (Giessen 1933). Apart from the main use of 'having a share in something with someone', it can mean 'sharing' or 'fellowship (arising out of the common sharing of something)', or very occasionally, it can mean 'willingness to give a share, generosity'. For a detailed survey of *koinonia* in scripture and a recent bibliography see J.Reumann's "Koinonia in Scripture: Survey of Biblical Texts" in *On The Way To Fuller Koinonia. The Official Report of the Fifth World Conference in Faith and Order*, eds. T.F.Best and G.Gassmann (Geneva: WCC, 1994), pp. 37-69.

[35] C.F.D.Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: CUP 1977), p.69.

however, the corporate dimension is stressed. The use of κοινων- words in the sense of sharing *with others* in something in Paul's letters is supplemented by other important Pauline language (such as Paul's use of the proposition "*sun*" and the phrase "*en Christo*") suggestive of a relationship together with others in God and these can be referred to in support of the idea that for Paul participation and other descriptions of relationship to God are to be thought of not simply in individualistic terms.

For example, the expression *en Christo* occurs 165 times in Paul's letters, and while both *en* and *en Christo* are used by Paul in a variety of ways[36], one of the main meanings of the latter phrase involves a corporate understanding. In Gal. 3:28, a common baptism implies that "you are all one in Christ Jesus", while elsewhere whole churches are described as being in Christ (cf. Gal. 1:22, 1 Thess. 1:1, 1 Thess. 2:14). Elsewhere, as at Rom. 5:12-21 and 1 Cor. 15:20-3, 45-9, we find Paul contrasting those who are 'in Adam' with those who are 'in Christ'. Adam and Christ appear to be representative figures here, suggestive of two different ways of being human, two possible manifestations of humanity. Being 'in Christ' entails in this respect some sort of incorporative or participatory notion, because otherwise being in Christ would not imply (for example) that Christ's resurrection meant resurrection for all who are in him (Rom. 5:18ff.). Certainly the phrase is also applied to the individual's relation with Christ, as at 2 Cor. 5:17 for example, where "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (cf. 2 Cor. 12:2), and it has behavioural and ethical implications for the individual (cf. Rom. 12:3-8), but this reflects only one pole (the other being the corporate pole) of Paul's understanding of being in Christ.

It is perhaps Paul's understanding of the church as the Body of Christ which best illustrates the corporate nature of much of his thought concerning relationship with God in Jesus Christ. The risen Christ is conceived of at times as a corporate entity, of whom Christians are members (e.g. 1 Cor. 6:15, 1 Cor. 12:12f), and at other times Christians are understood to become a united body by participating in Christ's body and blood (e.g. 1 Cor. 10/11); elsewhere it

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36 For example 'by the instrumentality of Christ' (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:2) or 'on the authority of Christ' (e.g. 1 Thess 4:1). See A.J.M.Wedderburn's article 'Some Observations on Paul's use of the phrases "in Christ" and "with Christ" ' *JSNT* 25 (1985) 83-97 for a detailed consideration.

seems that as Christians come together there is a single human organism[37] 'in Christ' (Gal. 3:28) or a situation where Christ is 'all and in all' (Col. 3:10-11). It would seem natural from this to take the whole Church as Christ's body, even though Paul speaks at times of the local church as being the body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:27). (Given that Paul was addressing local churches often suffering internal difficulties, it is perhaps not surprising that we should find the latter emphasis in his writings). Certainly the relationship of members to one another in the body of Christ is an intimate one; Paul can speak of how, if one member suffers, all suffer together (1 Cor. 12:26), and how if one member suffers and is comforted, all are comforted (2 Cor. 1:3-7, cf. 2 Cor. 2:3). However the individual is not somehow lost by absorption into Christ's body, Paul speaking of the particularity and importance of each individual member by analogy with the various organs of the body (1 Cor. 12:14f.).

The phrase 'Body of Christ' is problematic however - can Paul mean when he says that "you are the Body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27) that a whole collection of people somehow equals the person of Christ or his body? Ziesler addresses himself to this question, rejecting some common and misplaced answers to it.[38] Importantly, Ziesler rejects the idea of a Hebraic notion of 'corporate personality' being used by Paul in regard to the Body of Christ, recent scholarship suggesting that it is no longer clear whether Old Testament and later Judaism envisaged *corporate* figures (though representative figures were certainly present, as mentioned above). Positively, Ziesler suggests that we can at least say that Paul's corporate language "means that believers corporately live under his power and authority".[39] Thus those who are in Christ, members of his body, are influenced by him, being freed from other powers (e.g. Gal. 2:4), allowing Christ to work through them (cf. Paul's boasting in Christ, Rom. 15:17), and dependent on Christ. If we take being in Christ as equivalent to being in the Spirit (which Ziesler sees as justified in the light of Rom. 8 and 1 Cor. 15:45b[40]) then the ethical activities and service of the Christian community which mark the

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[37] However the phrase 'body of Christ' should not be understood to imply an organic relation of the believer to Christ whereby, for example, the believer's falling away causes a certain incompleteness in Christ. The interdependence of believers as the body of Christ is also a shared dependence on Christ, Paul nowhere suggesting that Christ is dependent on believers, organically or otherwise.

[38] J.A.Ziesler, '*Pauline Christianity*' (Oxford: OUP, 1990), pp.59-72.

[39] Ibid., p.65.

[40] Ibid., pp.46-48.

Spirit's presence (cf. 1 Cor. 2:4; 12:4-11, Gal. 5:18 etc.) show how relationships between human beings are radically affected by this membership of Christ. Hooker notes how the Corinthians failed to realise fully the implications of sharing in Christ; for them Christ had given that they might receive, Christ died so they lived, Christ became poor, so they became rich. But for Paul:

> being in Christ means sharing in in the dying as well as the living, in the giving as well as the receiving, in the poverty as well as the riches, in the humiliation as well as the glory. That is why conformity to the gospel affects his whole lifestyle.[41]

Thus participation in Christ has implications for all aspects of life, including the ethical, the social and the economic spheres.

I G.Panikulam goes so far as to say that *koinonia* is always used for someone's sharing in Christ with others and that "this leads to the conclusion that *koinonia* in Paul has a strict communitarian sense".[42] The antecedent presupposition of participation is often the living Christ, in whom (perhaps through the Spirit) Christians participate, by following Christ's example, obeying his teaching, sharing similar sufferings, partaking of his body and blood, and entering into the dynamic of death and resurrection through baptism. Behind this we can perhaps glimpse the idea of Christ as "the true self of the human race, standing in that perfect union with God to which others can attain only as they are incorporate in Him; the mind, whose thought is truth absolute... which other men think after Him; the true life of man, which other men live by sharing it with Him".[43] Paul does not provide a detailed explanation of how exactly Christians participate in Christ beyond giving examples of such participation. There is room however for a Trinitarian understanding of how participation occurs for Christians. Phil. 2:1 and 2 Cor. 13:14 show how Paul understood Christians as becoming partakers of Christ and a fellowship among themselves *in the Spirit*. Thus, there is some support for Panikulam's conclusion that "In its God-ward and brother-ward dimensions the Spirit becomes the activating and dynamic principle making the concept of *koinonia* itself a dynamic reality".[44] Indeed Panikulam, taking 1Cor. 1:9 as his starting-point, sees Paul's thought on

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41 M.D.Hooker, 'Interchange in Christ and Ethics' in *JSNT* 25 (1985), p.14.

42 G.Panikulam, *Koinonia in the New Testament: A Dynamic Expression of Christian Life* (Rome: Analecta Biblica 85, Biblical Institute Press, 1979), p.5.

43 C.H.Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP 1953), p.249.

44 Panikulam, *Koinonia in the New Testament*, p.78

koinonia as oriented around the idea of a calling to *koinonia* with the Son, a *koinonia* realised in the Spirit. Panikulam perhaps overstates his case, and understates the variety of use of *koinonia* in the Pauline corpus, but it is noteworthy that we can draw out this Trinitarian strand from Paul's thought.

A further contrast between Pauline and Platonic understandings of participation relates to the way in which Paul can use *koinoneo* to mean not "to share or participate in" but "to give a share in, to make (another) a participant".[45] Paul does this on four occasions (Gal. 6:6, Rom. 12:13, Phil. 4:15, 16). This usage suggests a dimension to participation involving the activity of contributing to making the other a fellow-sharer. The much more individualistic way of participation stressed in Platonic writings lacks this nuance, a nuance which emphasises that *koinonia* is a dynamic including in its movement the activity of assisting others to *koinonia*. Interestingly Philippians 4:15 uses *koinonia* in terms of a mutual assistance and reception of assistance and illustrates how Paul can stress the active element within participation as mutual assistance, an active element resting on the passive element understood as reception of God's gift of Himself in Christ through faith.

Ontologically Paul is quite ambiguous, in two places (1 Cor. 12:12f and 1 Cor. 6:15f) suggesting that being in Christ was somehow really to become part of him, while elsewhere speaking of the congregation of Christians as a corporate unity, participating in Christ in a manner falling short of *organic* identification. In the light of such ambiguity, we can at most say that in Paul the participating relation of Christians to Christ is one involving utter dependence[46], intimately relating Christians to one another. Moule captures this in seeing phrases such as 'we are one body in Christ' as meaning that Christians owe their deep unity with one another to the fact that they are 'in Christ', incorporated in him and in unity with one another as they participate together in Christ.[47] However Moule

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[45] See M.McDermott, S.J., 'The Biblical Doctrine of KOINONIA' in *Biblische Zeitschrift* (1975), 64-77.

[46] J.D.G.Dunn puts it well when he notes that the "religious experiences of the earliest community, including experiences like those enjoyed by Jesus himself, were seen as dependent on him and derivative from him... the religious experience of the Christian is not merely experience like that of Jesus, it is experience which at all characteristic and distinctive points is derived from Jesus the Lord, and which only makes sense when this derivative and dependent character is recognised". *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM 1975), p.194f., p.342.

[47] Moule, *The Origin of Christology*, p.73.

suggests further that "it is by participating in what is thus given that Christians become a 'united' body"[48]. We would rather say that to participate in what is given is to be, in part a united body. In this way we do not stand in danger of separating the individual's participation in Christ from interpersonal relations. Finally we should note an (at least implicit) eschatological dimension to Paul's understanding of participation. Paul speaks of how "we suffer with him (Christ) in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom. 8:17), of how we are to be made alive at a future resurrection by being in Christ (1 Cor. 15:20-23), and Ziesler points out that in Paul's discussions of the Eucharist at 1 Cor. 10:16-21 and 11:20-33 Paul "sees it as looking back to the death of Jesus, as conveying a present fellowship of participants with one another and their lord, and as pointing forward to the messianic banquet". This eschatological dimension should perhaps further caution us against an ontological identification of the present church with Christ.

2.9 The Gospel Writers

Moving on to the Gospels, there are relatively few occurrences of terms which relate to the word 'participation'. Among a number of isolated occurrences in the Synoptic Gospels, Mt. 23:30 and Lk. 5:10 use *koinonos*, meaning one having in common with (a particular function) and Lk. 5:7 has *metochos*, meaning partner, in this case fellow fisherman. The one reference to *koinonia* in Acts, at Acts 2:42, has been argued by McDermott to imply "a unity of heart and spirit among the early Christians, a recurring theme in the early chapters of Acts (1:14; 2:46; 4:32)".[49] We might add that the *koinonia* referred to is one involving "the breaking of the bread and the prayers" (2:42b), so that *koinonia* does not simply mean "community", but the community sharing in a particular relation to the God who has called them to *koinonia* (cf. Acts 2:39). The synoptic gospels certainly do not continue to use κοινων– words with anything like the frequency or depth of meaning which we find in Paul.

Before moving on to the letter to the Hebrews, we should note that much of the work done by the term 'participation' in Paul's letters is carried by the idea of

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48 Moule, *The Origin of Christology*, p.73

49 M.McDermott, "The Biblical Doctrine of KOINONIA" in *Biblische Zeitschrift* 19 (1975), p.231

'indwelling' in the Johannine literature. The link of relationships between believers and between believers and God is underlined (e.g. 1 Jn. 4:12, 1 Jn. 2:5-6, Jn. 15:4), the unity of believers is understood in terms of indwelling (e.g. Jn. 17:21, 17:22b), the dependence of believers on Christ is stressed (e.g. Jn. 15:4), and the indwelling does not omit an eschatological perfecting of the believers (e.g. Jn. 17:24, 12:32, contra Bultmann's claim that John's eschatology is strictly realised[50].) Admittedly there are differences - for example John tends to see indwelling as being reciprocal (e.g. the reciprocal indwelling of Jesus and the disciples, Jn. 15:7) whereas Paul did not speak of Christ participating in believers. Again John is much readier to speak of believers being in *God* than Paul is, Paul's Jewish piety and sense of God's transcendence perhaps constraining him to speak rather of participation, and participation in Christ as a mediating relationship with the Father. Still, the fact that 'indwelling' is used in the ways illustrated perhaps goes some way to explain the paucity of terms relating to participation in the Johannine corpus.

2.10 Hebrews

Finally, the Epistle to the Hebrews frequently speaks of *metochos* or *metochoi*, partaker(s). So at Heb. 3:1 Christian brethren are sharers in a heavenly calling, they are *metochoi tou Christou* (Heb. 3:14), and "have become partakers of the Holy Spirit" (Heb. 6:4). C.K.Barrett asserted that a Platonic type of vertical dualism between earth and heaven does not *control* the author's thinking, Barrett having established the role of history and time in the letter.[51] Even so, there do seem to be echoes of a Platonic understanding of participation, not in terms of an imitation of a heavenly reality but rather in terms of a partaking of a superior and permanent reality, albeit one which breaks into earthly existence in an unplatonic way. H.W. Attridge, commenting on Heb. 3:1 says that "the terminology of participation... has, at least in this context, some of the connotations associated with the Platonic notion that things in the material world of change and decay have their reality by 'participation' in an ideal

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50 See for example R.Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. II (London: SCM, 1955), pp.37-43.

51 C.K.Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*. Festschrift for C.H.Dodd. Ed. D.Daube and W.D.Davies (Cambridge: CUP, 1956), pp.363-393.

realm".[52]

As to the time when participation occurs F.F. Bruce suggests that the meaning of the phrase "partners in Christ" at Heb. 3:14 is "probably not that of participation in Him (as in the Pauline expression "in Christ"), but rather that of participation with Him in His heavenly kingdom - the unshakeable kingdom of Heb. 12:28".[53] But this need not necessarily imply that there is no real participation in the present life, Heb. 6:4 speaking of a present participation in the Holy Spirit which means for the baptised participants a tasting "of the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:5). We should note the falling away of some who have already partaken in the Holy Spirit (cf. Heb. 6:1-8) and perhaps agree with E.Nardoni that,

> since their baptism, believers have come to partake in Christ in the eschatological reality. Yet, while on earth, they are exposed to a loss of their participation. Their definitive participation is contingent on their faithfulness to the end.[54]

The Epistle uses the concept of participation to encourage its readers who may be tempted to return to the Mosaic priestly system (Heb. 3:1-6) and to strengthen those who suffer and are tempted; "For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence (*upostaseos*) firm to the end" (Heb. 3:14). While the use of 'participation' stresses the nearness of the new invisible world and in part seeks to comfort, it does not exclude the need for perseverance or make room for moral laxity. If the brethren share in the heavenly call (Heb. 3:1), they are to understand that this includes becoming sharers in discipline (*paideia*) (Heb. 12:8). Not participating in such discipline implies that "you are illegitimate children and not sons" (Heb. 12:8), and part of sharing in this discipline involves ethically proper and loving relations with the brethren (Heb. 12:14-13:9).

Particularly notable in the Epistle is the way in which the relation between Christ and the church can be understood in terms of participation. Christians are exhorted to share in the heavenly call (Heb. 3:1), a call which brethren share in as they are "faithful in God's house" (v.2,6) and as they do so they "are his house" (v.6). As Nardoni points out the Christians are "brothers of Christ in

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52 H.W.Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, c.1989), p.106.

53 F.F.Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964) p.68.

54 E.Nardoni, 'Partakers in Christ (Hebrews 3:14)' in *New Test. Stud.* vol. 37 (1991), p.472.

God's house because they are given to partake in a heavenly call (*kleseos epouraniou metochoi*)."[55] It is this group which is also referred to as the partakers in Christ in the later phrase in the same section (Heb. 3:14), so that it is the Christian community that has received the heavenly call and "are partaking in the transcendent and eschatological reality that the divine call offers".[56] Indeed it is not implausible that the parallel of "we are God's house" (Heb. 3:6) and "we have become partakers in Christ" (Heb. 3:14) is meant by the author to imply that the participatory relationship of believer to Christ occurs in God's house. Nardoni argues that to understand the participation of the Christian in Christ in Hebrews more closely, we must pay attention to the role of Christ in God's house, a role which is primarily that of high priest.[57] Interestingly, this is precisely what Heb. 3:1-6 reflects upon, and Nardoni brings out the point that the four prominent roles ascribed to Jesus in this passage, that of apostle, high priest, the son of God and the messianic king, are all encompassed, dominated and directed by the notion of Jesus as high priest.[58] The Christian community participates in these various roles of Christ; the apostolic witness (e.g. Heb. 13:4, 13:17), the divine sonship (e.g. Heb. 2:10, 12:23), the royal power (Heb. 12:28) of the messianic king, and the priestly capacity to approach God in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 10:19-22).[59]

This capacity to approach the heavenly sanctuary is understood as a regular, free right for the believer, in contrast to the exclusive privilege of the high priest of the old covenant (Heb. 9:25, Heb. 10:19). Christians are exhorted to draw near to the sanctuary, confident of the way having been pioneered by Christ and assured by his blood (Heb. 10:19), Christians are to "draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). This is not to undermine the uniqueness of Christ's sole mediatorship and intercession, nor the expiation due to him alone, but the priestly language used to describe the liturgical performances of the community sanctified by Jesus' blood is suggestive of "the priestly capacity of the believer of the new covenant, a capacity which derives from, and partakes in, Christ's

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55 Nardoni,'Partakers in Christ', p.458.

56 Ibid., p.459.

57 Ibid., p.459.

58 Ibid., 459-462.

59 Ibid., 462-465 for a more detailed discussion.

unique priesthood. Such a participation is consistent with the pattern of Christians partaking in Jesus' titles".[60]

2.11 Conclusion: Implications

A number of closing remarks concerning 'participation' in the New Testament should be made. First of all, the concept can be thought of using different terms, deriving from the root κοινων- or μετεχ–. Participation is dependent upon the action of God, involving a coming together of those called to participation. Participation is dependent upon Christ in particular, and it is tempting to suggest that "in him exists a *koinonia* between man and God, because he is himself God and man. Incarnation is the first moment of God's *koinonia*".[61] Strictly speaking we cannot read this conclusion off from the Biblical documents, but it is certainly a valid implication from the scriptural evidence. Again the work of the Spirit is often in view, facilitating participation, and enabling it to continue and perhaps even perfecting it. Participation is God's initiative, yet it depends upon human responsiveness for its development, and participation has both a 'vertical' and a 'horizontal' dimension, involving relationships between participants as well as between believers and God. (We have often found κοινων- words to be best translated as implying 'participation with others in something', especially the Pauline corpus). There is a real participation in God in the present life, yet there is also a future completion or perfection of this participation awaited. At only one point is it suggested that believers partake of the 'divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4) and it is much more frequent to find that in which we participate being *correspondent* to the way of Christ's existence in its social, behavioural, ethical, didactic and spiritual dimensions. Such participation is not simply due to our autonomous imitation however because our dependence on Christ and his initiative through the Spirit is responsible for raising us to participation, a participation including involvement in Christ's suffering, death and resurrection, which path to resurrection has first been forged out by Christ. We have also seen how participation can be 'in' the various roles of Christ in his relation to creation (e.g. as high priest) and in his relation to the Father (e.g. as Son of God), but this is again dependent on Christ and our relationship with him. The

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60 Nardoni,'Partakers in Christ', p.468, see also 465-467.

61 Panikulam, *Koinonia in the New Testament*, p.140.

locus of our participation is often regarded as the Christian community (e.g. 1 Cor. 10/11, Heb. 3:1-6) which immediately suggests the significance of ecclesiology for our discussion. Further, sacramental participation is especially highlighted (e.g. 1 Cor. 10/11, Jn.6:52,56, cf. Rom. 6:3-4) and given the corporate nature of participation it is at least plausible to infer that the beginning of our *active* participation in Christ is the moment of embedding in the Christian family, baptism.

Talk of 'divinisation' through participation finds little Biblical warrant and requires considerable qualification (such as that of our continuing dependence on Christ) if it is to bear any continuity with the scriptural understanding of participation. Undergirding the notion of participation in the New Testament is no clear ontology but there is room for an understanding built on a Trinitarian basis and this is perhaps the most promising way forward, understanding our participation as coming about through the Trinitarian action of God and involving us in the dynamic of interrelations within the Trinity (e.g. the Father and Son 'making their home' in the believer, Jn. 14:23). As we are caught up in the Son's response to the Father through the Spirit we find ourselves being led to that teleological fulfilment in which both horizontal and vertical relationships have 'come right' and which have enabled our ontological re-constitution as who we were meant to be. (This assumes that relationship is an ontological rather than simply a logical category - see Chapter 3 for this). Further, the nature of God's Trinitarian life being one of self-differentiation, perfect giving and receiving and harmony in otherness at least suggests the possibility that the creature's otherness, giving and receiving might find a place in God.

3. PARTICIPATION IN EARLY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

To survey the large amount of material relating to the concept of participation in the first six centuries after Christ would require a thesis in itself. Here we shall concentrate on key aspects of the notion which provide further insight into the ways the notion was understood and developed, along with ways in which the concept helped crystallise particular theological positions and focus debate.

3.1 Origen

In Origen we can see the first extensive use of a theology of participation, and one which is grounded in the (Platonic and Neoplatonic) understanding of 'participation' (*metoche, metousia*) as relating lower to higher within a hierarchy of being. Origen writes that the Son is begotten of the Father "as an act of will proceeds from the mind" (*De Principiis* 1.2.6, hereafter *D.P.*), the Son being begotten as the image of the invisible God, "and what we are to the Son, such is the Son to the Father" (*D.P.* 1.2.6). (What we are to the Son depends on our participation in the Son for Origen, so Origen seems to be suggesting a kind of participation of the Son in the Father here). Origen works hard to give the Son his due in describing his relationship with the Father but supposed Biblical warrant for the Son's secondary nature (e.g. Jn. 14:28, Jn. 17:3, Mk. 10:8), added weight to Origen's case for distinguishing the Father (as *autotheos*) from the Son; indeed "all that is deified... by participation in the godhead of the *autotheos*, ought more properly to be called not 'o *Theos*' but '*Theos*'" (*Comm. on John* 2.2) argues Origen. In the light of this, Crouzel's view that *metoche* is indicative not of "participation" but of "communication" in the context of the Son's participation in the Father requires qualification.[1] "Communication" does not of itself imply the Son's dependence or subordinate status as one who has been communicated to, such status being implicit in Origen's use of 'participation', although it does capture the Father's initiative and gives us perhaps a sharper sense of the Neoplatonic influences on Origen.

But not only is it the case that the Son (and the Holy Spirit) participate in the

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[1] Crouzel states that for Origen "the Father and the Son possess a common nature, of which the Father is the origin and which he communicates to the Son." H.Crouzel, *Theologie de l'image de Dieu* (Paris: Aubier, 1956), p.110.

Father, because at a different level 'rational creatures' participate in the Trinity. (A third kind of participation might also be mentioned - namely that of creatures in the Trinity in virtue of which they have their being[2]). Origen remarks that "all rational beings are partakers of the Word of God" (*D.P.* 1.3.6). Such a participation varies "in proportion to the earnestness of the soul and the capacity of the mind" (*D.P.* 4.4.9). The human soul of Jesus had clung to God from the beginning to a preeminent degree, unlike other souls whose affections had 'cooled' to varying degrees, as a result of the exercise of free-will.[3] This relates to Origen's understanding of an originary world of spiritual beings in *koinonia* with God, minds or rational beings which strictly speaking became souls (*psuches*) as a result of wearying of contemplation and the divine love, (see *D.P.* 2.8 on this). Jesus' firmness of purpose in clinging to God ensured that what formerly depended on will was, by influence of long custom changed to nature, his human soul becoming attached to the Son in a "union inseparable and insoluble" (*D.P.* 4.4.4), so that we can assume that in Christ there was a human rational soul, yet not one susceptible to human sin (*D.P.* 2.6.5). (Notice here that Jesus' status is achieved by moral means and appears to have ontological implications). The varying degrees of 'cooling' help explain the diversity of states human beings find themselves in (*D.P.* 2.9.6), and the fact that this falling away is a result of disaffection and the exercise of free-will suggests that the way back to participation in the Trinity is through an appropriate use of freedom and a focusing of love on the Trinity. That this progression is also understood in a rational and intellectual sense is made clear by Origen (cf. *D.P.* 2.11.7) The tone here is deeply Platonic in that the soul becomes more free to contemplate "the pure" as bodily burdens become less cumbersome (and are finally alleviated at death.) The 'inner man' never falls so far as to be beyond recall to the image and likeness of God, an initiative which may be God's but which also depends on human effort for its realisation (*D.P.* 4.4.10). The rational creature's participation in God varies according to the degree of the creature's dedication and the capacity for such participation (*D.P.* 4.4.9). (On the whole Origen does not tend to stress the corporate dimension of participation,

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[2] Origen sees God Himself as transcending Being; God is "beyond Being"*(Comm. on John* 19.6) and "God does not even participate in being. For he is participated in, rather than participates" (*Contra Celsum* VI.64). These statements also reveal the asymmetrical character of participation in Origen's thought.

[3] Origen sees a primordial and intimate fellowship of souls with God, but he does not make clear whether this originary situation involves human souls encircling the Father, the Logos or both.

concentrating on the 'vertical' rather than the 'horizontal' implications of the notion, perhaps reflecting the dominance of Platonic rather than Christian ideas in his understanding of the term.) Origen's Eucharistic teaching is of a piece with his emphasis on participation depending on right conduct. He condemns those who consume the elements while also harbouring enmity for their neighbours but the Eucharistic act is "a holy thing which sanctifies those who use it with a sound purpose".[4] Having said this, a Gnostic, Platonizing tendency can be seen in the way in which, in a number of passages, Origen distinguishes two aspects to sacramental nourishment:

> The outward rite, he implies, which imparts the sacramental body and blood, is for the simpler grade of Christians, while the more advanced, with their profounder insight, find nourishment in the Logos Himself.[5]

Participation in God is a participation in the Trinity for Origen, and as

> by participation in the Son of God a man is adopted among God's sons, and by participation in the wisdom which is in God he becomes wise, so, too, by participation in the Holy Spirit he becomes holy and spiritual(*D.P.* 4.4.5) .

Participation in the Holy Spirit is the beginning of the road to perfection, the Spirit sanctifying and purifying the creature. In relation to this, it should be noted that the soul's ascent to God is initiated for Origen by baptism, the Spirit making it possible for us to receive and benefit from what God has done for us in Christ. While the work of the Spirit is always present in those participating in the Godhead, it leads on to a participation in Christ, participation in whom makes the participant rational and wise (See *D.P.* 1.3.7-8). (This is not to say the Logos has not been active since the Fall, for its activity can be seen reflected in rational creatures' possession of intelligence, which is participation in the Logos (cf. *D.P.* 1.3.6).) Further, through the Logos "the highest and holiest of rational creatures are themselves 'made gods' (*theopoiethenai*) - by their own mediated and analogous 'participation in the deity of the Father' (*metoche tes ekeinou theoteton - Comm. on John* 2:2-3)".[6] This progression upwards through the persons of the Trinity is typical of Origen's treatment of the ascent of the soul in stages. We have noted already the importance of a 'rational love' in

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[4] *Contra Celsum*, 8,33

[5] See J.N.D.Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: A & C Black, 5th ed., 1977), p.214. The earlier Alexandrian thinker, Clement, comes close to a mechanical view of participation through the Eucharistic act at times; "To drink Jesus's blood (Clement states), is to participate in His incorruptibility;... and those who drink it are sanctified in body and soul". Ibid., p.213

[6] B.Drewery, 'Deification' in *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp* ed. P.Brooks (London: SCM, 1975), p.45.

progressing through the stages and 'degrees' of participation but Origen is also concerned in places to remind us of the dependence on that which is participated for participation to be a reality.

A danger in considering the soul's ascent through stages is that stages are 'left behind' as successive stages are reached. Origen's remarks on our participation in the Trinity and qualifications concerning the 'unceasing' work of for example the Spirit in the work of perfecting the creature should perhaps warn us against understanding the various levels of participation as discrete. It is "through the ceaseless work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, renewed at every stage of our progress, (that) we may perchance just succeed at last in beholding the holy and blessed life" (*D.P.* 1.3.8). Origen also speaks at times of our ultimate participation not as being one in the Father alone, but as participation in the unity of the Father and the Son (e.g. *D.P.* 3.6.1). Even so, some of Origen's remarks concerning faith in the Incarnation as "the period of the shadow" suggest that this is a stage which is left behind as the soul ascends (see esp. *Comm. on John* 1.9). These points can best be reconciled by noting that Origen is often less than clear about his distinction between Jesus Christ and the Logos in his writings, but that his Platonic inclinations dominate so that "Origen's mysticism centred on Christ is ultimately transcended by a mysticism centred on the eternal Word".[7] But this estimation of the importance of the Incarnation immediately raises questions about Origen's ontology, questions which, as we shall see, lead to deep concerns about Origen's thought.

3.2 Origen and the Ontology of Participation

Crouzel, dealing with Origen's image-theology, shows how the human being proceeds through stages from being in God's image to being in his likeness ("which will be conferred upon us in proportion to the perfection of our merits" (*D.P.* 3.6.1)) to being one with him ("from being similar to become 'one thing'... that in the consummation or end God is 'all in all'" (*D.P.* 3.6.1)). This final stage led Jerome to accuse Origen of "distributing the essence of Almighty God to angels and men"[8], and is one more indication to scholars such as Meyendorff that Origen is working in the framework of an "essentially Platonic monism"[9] .

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[7] A.Louth, *Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, p.66.

[8] See G.W. Butterworth's *Origen on First Principles* (London: SPCK, 1936), p.326

[9] J.Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (New York: St. Vladimir's, 1975), p.51.

However it can be argued that while Origen speaks of our 'kinship' with God and of how 'men have a kind of blood-relationship with God' (*D.P.* 4.4.10) and while it may be that an understanding of deification lies in the background of Origen's thought concerning the rational creature's ascent, such criticisms pay too little attention to the way in which Origen distinguishes the creatures' 'deity by participation' from the deity of God; Drewery points out that "Their 'deification' is always by grace, never by nature: ... they are never...immutable, eternal as is God... They are gods who can go wrong and lose their divinity"[10] . The price Origen pays for such a distinction is of course a high one; Origen speculates that there will be successive cycles of worlds, rational creatures passing through different phases of existence according as they choose good or evil (e.g. D.P. 1.6.3, 3.6.3). This in turn suggests further falls are possible, undermining Christian eschatology.[11] Further, even if Origen succeeds in distinguishing deity by participation from the Father's deity, we need to inquire whether Origen distinguishes our (prospective) participation in God from the participation of Christ in the Father.

What is the distinction between our participation in God and that of Christ, between our prospective divinisation and the divinity of Jesus Christ? If by dint of discipline and long-custom we too are joined to the Logos in a union 'inseparable and insoluble' then does our status not become the same as that of Christ, and our relation to the Logos similar? (Origen exhorts his readers to *imitate* Christ and the deification of Christ's human nature "is the terminus of the divine pedagogy for all those who follow him to God".[12]) Very briefly, the uniqueness of Christ lies in the fact that his *nous*[13] alone clung to God unchangeably, enabling his free-will (because it made its definitive choices prior to Incarnation) to be unhampered by incarnation and enabling his *nous* to combine with the characteristics of the psychic realm to positive effect. Our free-will is unreliable in comparison because of our being immersed in the psychic

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[10] Drewery, 'Deification', p.45.

[11] Origen himself argued that God will be all in all as at the beginning finally, a situation realised through discipline, persuasion and instruction where human beings are concerned (cf *D.P.* 3.5.7f). The question is whether his ontology and view of enduring human mutability expressed elsewhere can allow for this hopefulness.

[12] Drewery, ibid., p.46.

[13] *Psuche* and *nous* are to be distinguished in Origen's understanding of 'soul'. *Psuche* refers to the empirical condition of the inner person, including the mechanics of passibility as well as the rational, intuitive, contemplative element of *nous*.

realm before definitively orientating ourselves towards God. Not only so, but the price paid for our original infidelity appears to be *permanent* instability and the possibility of further falls, unlike Christ.[14] So the quality of our relationship with the Logos has an element of contingency about it which does not hold in Jesus' case, distinguishing our participation in the Logos from that of Jesus.

The dioratic[15] quality of the *nous* entails an openness towards the Logos which is never lost and which allows for a share in the divine life, participation. Origen speaks of our 'participation' in the Logos and also of Jesus' participation in the Logos. Such language gives the impression of there being an important distinction between Jesus and the Logos, Jesus' soul being "in partnership with the Word of God" (*D.P.* 4.4.4). In the end, as we have seen, Origen chooses to see the Incarnation leading us up to a higher conception of God the Logos, suggesting a separation of Jesus and the Logos in the hierarchy of being. Origen's difficulties rest in part with his notion of 'participation'. However much the word may be intended to operate analogically when applied to different levels (of our participation in God, the participation of Jesus in the Logos and participation within the Trinity), the term always relates in Origen to the participation of an inferior, dependent reality in a superior, independent reality. So in attempting to use the term to describe Jesus' relation to the Logos, it is not surprising that the idea of Incarnation gives way finally to a Logocentric theology. However Origen still manages to defend the uniqueness of Christ by following this course and he does separate and connect the Logos from deified man, as archetype from ectype. Such thought leads us to a discussion of what it is to be in the *image* of God, a discussion we shall take up later. What is clear is that the understanding of participation in terms of imaging is also found in Plato, and Origen shows his reliance on this notion of participation as he struggles to distinguish between our participation in God and that of the Son in the Father:

> Sometimes the term 'image' is applied to an object painted or carved on some material, such as wood or stone. Sometimes a child is said to be the image of its parent, or when the likeness of the parent's features is in every respect faithfully reproduced in the child. Now I think the first of these illustrations may be fitfully applied to him who was made 'in the image and likeness of God', that is, man... But in regard to the Son of God... the image may be compared to our second illustration; for this reason, that he is the invisible image of the invisible God... (*D.P.* 1.2.6).

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[14] Augustine rather unkindly refers to Origen's understanding of the soul's situation as endless real misery punctuated by short periods of fallacious happiness (*City of God* XII, 20).

[15] By dioratic we mean 'open at both ends', open that is to union with the Logos and also open and capable of being limited by association with the passible, empirical condition of the inner self.

Both illustrations rely on the idea of imaging, although Origen manages to distinguish different kinds of imaging, one being much more intimate and 'organic' than the other.

It still remains for us to assess the charge of "Platonic monism" levelled at Origen by Meyendorff. That Origen appears to understand reality in terms of the Platonic distinction between Being and Becoming seems clear from remarks he makes concerning followers of Christ in *Contra Celsum* ;

> It is not merely a matter of theory when they distinguish between being and becoming and between what is intelligible and what is visible, and when they associate truth with being and by all possible means avoid the error that is bound up with becoming. They look, as they have learnt, not at the things which are becoming, which are seen and on that account temporal, but at the higher things, whether one wishes to call them 'being' or things 'invisible' because they are intelligible, or 'things which are not seen' because their nature lies outside the realm of sense-perception." (*Contra Celsum* VII.46).

The problem arises concerning how to connect these two realms and it is here that Origen stands in danger of Platonic monism, of identifying that which is of the essence of human beings with the realm of Being. Space does not allow a detailed consideration here, but what is clear is that Origen does not in fact make such an identification, arguing that the human *nous* is open at both ends, able that is to be in union both with the mundane order of Becoming and also open to union with the Logos and the realm of Being. Paradoxically the *nous* itself, the organ of salvation, does not seem to belong to the order of Becoming because it is by nature immutable (*D.P.* 1.4.3), yet neither does it seem to belong to the order of Being because it had a 'beginning' (*D.P.* 1.2.2). (This understanding begins to challenge the Being/Becoming dualism which is at the heart of early understandings of participation, and while at one level it might be regarded as confused and contradictory, at another level it might be regarded as visionary!)

Origen's ontology is not simply a "Platonic monism" then, if by this we mean that the essential nature of the human being is ontologically identifiable with the divine realm. However his ontology still faces problems associated with the assumed exclusivity of the spheres of Being and Becoming. How, with this Platonic background, can the *nous* belong to both realms or neither or, if it belongs to one realm only, how is it open to union with the other realm? Origen

does not provide answers to such questions. Notions such as that of participation help to ease the tension in suggesting a degree of affinity to God which softens the sharp either/or duality inherent in the Platonic ontology of Being and Becoming but without a clear explanation of the ontological implications of such participation, the questions remain pressing.

Aware as he is of the distinction between the realms of Being and Becoming, Origen works with a hierarchy of Being, lower levels of reality being both connected and separated from higher levels by means of relationships he refers to as 'participation'. (And we have seen that this is true of relationships within the Trinity as well as between God and creaturely beings). As the human soul progresses it participates in ever higher levels of reality, moving from a simple, 'natural' participation in being-in-general to a participation in the Spirit to a participation in the Son to a participation in deity. (We have already cautioned against seeing such a process as rendering earlier stages superfluous as the soul progresses). This participation is the result of God's initiative and the free, loving and personal response of creatures to that initiative. But even at the dizzy heights of deification the rational souls betray their beginnings, retaining their freedom, their finitude and their instability. Thus participation in Origen signals the possibility of a relationship between ontologically different realms but does not imply ontological conversion. This is its richness and its final limitation in Origen's thought; how for example on this understanding are we to understand participation in God as a genuine relationship able to sustain a Christian eschatology if we wish to keep a qualitative distinction between participants and that which is participated, and what ontology can allow for this?

3.3 The Arian Crisis: Distinguishing Divine and Human Participation

The Arian crisis of the fourth century helps focus attention on an issue already present in Origen's thought, namely the distinction of Christ's 'participation' in the Godhead and human beings' participation in God. Arius denied any participation of the Son in the Father's *ousia* or *phusis*, being moved to do so perhaps by talk of a 'substantial' unity between Father and Son expressed by the likes of Alexander of Aphrodisias. Following Williams' assessment of the

evidence, it may be that Arius felt such language is "either (nonsensically) ditheistic, or else it is Sabellian - in which case it is *completely* subversive of the Son's dignity, since it altogether denies his independent existence".[16] It is not simply that Arius was concerned to stress the Father's sovereign position, which he probably was,[17] but that he also sought to assert the Son's distinctive position in the face of what he saw to be dangerously ambiguous phraseology and innovation. Behind Arius' protestations may lie quite precise understandings of 'substance' and 'substantial participation'. For Arius it seems that the Son "is not that Logos which is in the Father by nature and proper to his substance, nor his own proper wisdom, by which he created this world".[18] Substance is that which defines a thing essentially and if the Son's particularity is to be protected he must have essential characteristics different from those of the Father. Otherwise the Son cannot be a *hypostasis* or, if he is, then Father and Son are component elements in the Godhead, making the Godhead divisible so threatening divine simplicity and immateriality.[19]

But can the Son not 'participate' in the Father according to Arius? Arius would have no qualms accepting the Son's dependence on the Father but if, as seems plausible, Arius understood the term 'participation' in terms similar to that of Alexander and Porphyry, he could not accept that the Son 'participated' in the Father. Arius would seek to avoid talk of the Son's participation in the Father, indicative as it would be of the sort of identity of substance he is at pains to avoid.[20]

However Arius does use the term *metoche* according to the testimony of Alexander and Athanasius, the Son being appropriately named Wisdom and Word because the Son participates in the eternal Word and Wisdom of God.[21]

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16 R.Williams, 'The Logic of Arianism', *JTS* Vol 34, No.1, p.58.

17 Arius is shown to speak of God in an extremely absolutist fashion by Athanasius (*Or. con Ar.* 1:5-6) and Arius' letters are consistent with this, his letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia for example citing scripture which spoke of God as *monos* (Jn. 17:3, 1Tim. 6:16b, Rom. 16:27).

18 R.Williams, ibid., p.59, n.20.

19 R.Williams,ibid., pp.63-66 for a more detailed argument.

20 "..a good deal of Arius' polemic, in the *Thalia* and in his letters, hangs together very consistently if it is read as a refutation of *all* the available senses of substantial identity or participation applied to God and the Son, the whole range of meanings covered by *omoousios, ek tes tou patros ousias*, ... and so forth". R.Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* , p.223.

21 R.Williams, 'The Logic of Arianism', p.74, n.90.

While it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Arius' opponents are often couching his arguments in a manner suited to their critique of them, Arius also used such language in his *Thalia*, the divine Logos and Wisdom creating in the Son their closest possible finite image so that the Son could be said to 'share' in such divine powers in so far as he is directly their product: "He demonstrates the immediate and unimpeded effect of *logos* and *sophia*, and so in some significant measure reflects what they are like".[22] Indeed given that Arius is relatively clear in showing that participation *cannot* be substantial, he may well have felt liberated to use the term, indicative as it is of dependence, "capitalising a little on its vagueness and its acceptability in Trinitarian vocabulary of a conventional 'hierarchical' kind."[23] (Perhaps Arius was also influenced by Origenistic thought, both to claim orthodoxy ironically and sharing Origen's concern to establish the sovereignty of the Father, using similar terminology such as participation and image in describing the Son's relation to the Father).

When Arius speaks then of the Son participating in Wisdom and the Logos, it seems that he is not suggesting that being rational and wise is part of his essential definition, but accidental to him. According to Athanasius, Arius writes that:

> Christ is not true God, but by participation (*metoche*) even he was made God. The Son does not know the Father exactly, nor does the Logos see the Father perfectly, and neither does he perceive nor the Logos understand the Father exactly; for he is not the true and only Logos of Father, but by a name alone he is called Logos and Sophia and by grace is called Son and Power (*Or. con Ar.* 1.9).

Further, Athanasius notes that the Son's *metoche charitos* in God implies the Word's remaining "good by his own free will, while he chooses" (*Or. con Ar.* 1.5). But this ethical and voluntaristic understanding of the Son's obedience appears to suggest that there is some impropriety in ascribing divine titles outright to the Son, and Alexander and Athanasius are quick to point this out, accusing Arius of being able to call the Son Logos and Sophia only *katachrestikos*, an accusation whose implication is that the 'participation' of the Son in the Father's perfection is in name alone.[24] Further, Arius appears to

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[22] Ibid., p.74.

[23] Ibid., p.75.

[24] Williams details the meaning of *katachrestikos* as used by Alexander and Athanasius, 'The Logic of Arianism', p.76-77.

stand in danger of a kind of adoptionism (as Athanasius points out) if the Son is Logos and Sophia *kata charin*, rather than by substantial participation. It is only fair to note however that these allegations do not concur with the explicit statements of Arius in his own letters concerning the nature of the Son.

Athanasius' concerns with Arius' thought at this point reflect his desire to stress the true, full and authentic divinity of Christ. Our salvation depends for Athanasius on our participation in the divine nature, in virtue of which we are divinised (*theopoiesis*). Athanasius writes that "the Word became man so that we might be deified" (*De Inc.* 54), and "by becoming man He made us sons to the Father, and he deified men by Himself becoming man" (*Or. con Ar.* 1.38). Had Christ not been 'fully' divine he would have been unable to communicate his divine nature to us, his grace being sufficient only for himself;

> it is not possible, that He, who merely possesses from participation, should impart of that partaking to others, since what he has is not his own but the giver's; and what he has received is barely the grace sufficient for himself" (*De synodis* 51).

Kelly notes a certain Platonic realism about Athanasius' thought at this point, human nature appearing as "a concrete idea or universal in which all individual men participate".[25] Only through the Incarnation is our participation effected and through the Incarnation there is a kind of 'transfer' of human nature to a 'Christ-like' nature, a transfer beginning personally with the dawn of faith and being completed at death with the realisation of immortality and deification (e.g. *Ad Adelphium* 4). However the knowledge of God mediated to us through Christ " is a knowledge which is realised only through the activity of the Spirit and only as *in the Spirit* we participate in the Son and through him in God (*Or. Con. Ar.* 1.15-16)". Elsewhere Athanasius speaks of that divinisation which depends on our intimate union with the Spirit, who unites us to the Father through the Son, a union dependent on the response of our hearts (*Or. con Ar.* 2.59). Even so, more commonly Athanasius stresses that by suffusing human nature with his divinity, the Logos in His incarnation seems to effect redemption and return human nature to incorruptibility, irrespective of our moral acts, sacramental life or personal relationship with God. Gregg and Groh's (implicit) contrast between what Williams calls "a static and 'essentialist' (near-physicalist) view of

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[25] J.N.D.Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*,, p.378.

deification by participation"[26] in Athanasius and an Arian participation through the practice of moral advancement[27] is an oversimplification, but remarks along the lines of *Or. con Ar.* 2.59 are too few to allay our anxieties that Athanasius erred towards an understanding of the doctrine of salvation through participation and deification which seriously underplayed the role of ethics and ecclesiology for example.

Returning to Athanasius' criticism of Arius concerning the impropriety of ascribing divine titles to the Son, that this criticism is not necessarily entirely fair we can observe by noting that "Athanasius has telescoped two different points: for Arius it was an unavoidable conclusion that to call the Son Word and Wisdom was to speak metaphorically; but this does not imply that it is metaphor to call him rational and wise".[28] Behind such a distinction lies the Platonic understanding of the Form which in a sense alone can be properly designated as beautiful or good or whatever. The Son cannot be properly called Wisdom, yet he is a special case of wisdom and rationality in being the direct issue of God's will, without whom we would not know how rationality and wisdom can be authentically and lastingly present in the contingent order. Perhaps then we can see between the realm of Becoming to which we creatures belong and the realm of Being to which the Father belongs the Son as an ontologically unstable creature "yet perfectly in communion with the realm of Being, morally stable by the confluence of God's prior grace and his own unfaltering response".[29] If Williams (for example) is correct in his interpretation of Arius, then we can see that Arius does conceive of a real participation of the Son in the Father, albeit a non-substantial sharing. Such participation appears moralistic but given the metaphysical background against which Arius formulated his position and his concern to protect God's transcendence (in terms of freedom and understanding) there is perhaps no other way in which he could have understood the Son's participation.[30] What stress Arius laid on the Son's participation being paradigmatic for our own participation in God is open

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[26] Williams, 'The Logic of Arianism', p.75, n.97.

[27] R.C.Gregg and D.E.Groh, *Early Arianism - A View of Salvation* (London: SCM, 1981), pp.66-67.

[28] Ibid., p.78.

[29] Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism*, p.79.

[30] C.Stead's hypothesis of an ontic "middle ground" between creatures and Creator occupied by the Son (who is *ktisma* but not as one of the creatures according to Arius) is not implausible, but the evidence is too thin for this to be more than hypothesis. See his "The *Thalia* of Arius and the Testimony of Athanasius", *JTS* vol.29 (1978), pp. 20-52.

to question, but the voluntaristic and ethical nature of Arian participation allows for such a paradigm, and Athanasius' arguments concerned to "stop the Arians from any longer thinking they shall be as the Son!" (*Or. con Ar.* 3.24) communicate his own anxieties concerning ideas connected with such imitation.

In the end it seems that it is God's will which enables the participation of the Son in the Father, a will including the willing of the Son's wisdom and rationality which enable an enduring participation in the Father. We are able to see true wisdom and rationality incarnate in the Son, true reflections of the divine in the contingent, because of God's willing it to be so. But how true can such reflections be, given Arius' separation of the Son and the Father? If we separate the Son from the Father by suggesting that the Son is an act of the Father's will then, Athanasius argues, not only is Scripture contradicted (Scripture making it clear for Athanasius that the Word is the reasoning act of the Father), but there might be anything at the source of Being willing the Son to be as he is.[31] If the Father's will expresses the divine nature then "the first step to a Nicene account is taken; if it does not, an *arbitrary* deity is suggested".[32] Further, whether or not the Son is "morally stable", the Arians provide no final ontological distinction between the Son (who is directly *willed* by God) and creation (which is also *willed* by God).

Wider issues are raised by Athanasius' critique of Arius. Arius' understanding of participation in God as finally due to God's will suggests to Athanasius that access to who and what God is in Himself are sealed from us. This raises serious questions concerning the legitimacy of religious language, because if God's will and activity towards us (especially as the Father of Jesus Christ) are separated from the divine nature, then we appear to have no justification for the use of *theo*logical language. This separation also threatens to make the Son's work redundant:

> ..if God can truly give a share in his freedom and his glory to a creature by pure causeless will, resting on nothing in his own being, why can he not give directly to us what he gives to the Son? If, on the other hand, we do not receive a real share in the divine life through the Son, because he, as a creature, is as far from God as we are, what is the point of his incarnate work?.[33]

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[31] Athanasius reports that Arius taught that "since all beings are foreign and different from God in essence, so also the Word is alien and different from the essence and individuality of the Father in all respects..." (*Or. con Ar.* 1.6).

[32] Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, p.229.

[33] Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, p.240.

Perhaps a closer connection of being and act in God can answer concerns such as these[34], a connection which would help clarify the nature of our participation in God and its distinctiveness from the Son's relation to the Father. Arius' thought also reminds us that different notions of participation will have different implications for religious language, the role of Christ (and the Spirit) and metaphysics.

In contrast to the Arians, Athanasius distinguished the Son's being from that of the world by seeing it as belonging to the Father's substance, whereas the world's being was due to the will of God. So in his early writings Athanasius writes:

> ..being the good Offspring of Him that is good, and true Son, He is the Father's Power and Wisdom and Word, not being so by participation, nor as if these qualities were imparted to Him from without, as they are to those who partake of Him and are made wise by Him; but He is the very Wisdom, very Word, and very own Power of the Father, very Light, very Truth, very Righteousness, very Virtue... (*Contra Gentes* 46-47: 25, 93 BC).

Later Athanasius does speak of participation of the Son in the Father though, as Balas notes, this is a participation implying "a total communication of the essence of the Father".[35] This later use of 'participation' is significant in the context of understanding Athanasius' ontology. Zizioulas claims that Athanasius transforms the idea of substance because "to say that the Son belongs to God's substance implies that substance *possesses almost by definition a relational character*".[36] Some statements of Athanasius lend themselves to such an interpretation, Athanasius noting for example that without the Father-Son relationship "the perfectness and fullness of the Father's substance is depleted" (*Or. con. Ar.* 1.20). However other statements (such as a later use of participation noted by Balas above) do not lie easy with such an interpretation, Athanasius speaking for example of the Son's generation in terms of participation (e.g. *Or. con Ar.* 1.15-16). The fact that Athanasius speaks of the divine substance not *per se* but qualified with the term Father *may* indicate a consciously relational understanding of *ousia* but it might equally well have

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[34] A contemporary follower of Arius might respond to this by rejecting the possibility or desirability of knowledge of God's being, arguing that the only knowledge of God available and necessary for us can be inferred from God's actions and revelation of Himself in his created Logos.

[35] Balas, *Μετουσια Θεου*, p.12.

[36] J.Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 1985), p.84.

been motivated by the desire to reject Arius' view that the Son is in no way 'proper' to the Father.[37] Athanasius' thinking may invite a relational understanding of *ousia*, but how conscious and consistent his thoughts were geared in this direction is perhaps a little more open to debate than Zizioulas would have us believe.

One of the limitations making it difficult for Athanasius to develop a consideration of *ousia* in a relational sense was the terminology of the day. Lacking the language with which to describe 'otherness' within substance (*ousia* and *hypostasis* meaning the same thing for Athanasius and his contemporaries[38]), it was perhaps inevitable that Athanasius should struggle to speak of the Son's relation to the Father in terms distinct from that of creatures', 'participation' being a case in point. Even so, Athanasius' use of words such as *metousia* and careful qualifications of the Son as "wholly participating" unlike creation (e.g. *Or. con Ar.* 1.16) suggest ways in which Athanasius was aware of the importance of the distinction. It was to be the Cappadocians however who developed an ontology enabling being to be understood primarily as being in relation, and who thus promised a clearer distinction of terms applying to the relations of the Trinity ad intra and ad extra. Before investigating this more closely, an overview of the use and meaning of 'participation' in the Cappadocians is in order.

3.4 Gregory of Nyssa: The Process of Relational Participation

Of the Cappadocians, it is Gregory of Nyssa who develops the theme of participation most notably, his brother Basil only touching on the idea and his friend Gregory of Nazianzus giving the term little attention. Gregory's concern to refute the heresies of the Macedonians or Pneumatomachoi (who saw the Holy Spirit as an intermediary being, being both a creature and the source of sanctification for other creatures, but not having the divinity of the Father and the Son), perhaps invited the use of the term, as may have Eunomius' understanding of the Spirit as an intermediary being between God and the

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37 Williams summarises Arius' position well; "to be Father is, *as it happens*, an identifying and thus inalienable characteristic of God, but it is not part of the 'essential' definition of God, since God as such, being self-subsistent, cannot be defined as to *what* he is by reference to anything else", *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, p.61.

38 Zizioulas, ibid., p.87.

creatures. For Gregory there lie no such intermediaries between the Created and Uncreated natures, because such intermediaries would need to participate in both created and uncreated, a fusion Gregory finds "unimaginable" (*Adv. Maced.* 17: III,I). The gulf Gregory stresses between created and uncreated strikes a note quite discordant with the chain of being we found at times in Origen and seems to suggest a departure from certain Platonic speculations concerning intermediary degrees of being connected by the idea of participation[39] .

Looking more closely at his understanding of the hierarchy of Being however, we find that Platonic influences are present. The Christian division of created and uncreated beings is found together with the Platonic distinction between sensible and intelligible beings. The human being is a synthesis of intelligible and sensible qualities, the soul (*psuche*) being an intelligible substance (*De. hom. op.* 14: 176B), and the corporeal substance being sensible. The intelligible substance has an affinity with God though Gregory emphasises their distinction in stressing the created nature of the human being (see e.g. *De hom. op.* 16:44, 184C). Gregory relates the intelligible and the sensible, the incorporeal and the corporeal, the heavenly and the terrestrial using the concept of participation;

> through the formation of man both of these elements may receive a participation (*metousia*) of the things pertaining to the other; insofar as the intellectual nature of the soul, which seems to be akin and belonging to the celestial powers, is dwelling in terrestrial bodies, and in the restoration of all things this earthly flesh will be transferred to the heavenly place (*Or. Dom.* 4:44, 1165C-D).

Participation is used here to describe how different elements may relate to one another, Balas seeing the underlying meaning of participation in applications such as this as "that of a secondary (derived) possession of a property belonging primarily to another".[40] The mediation of the human being between the heavenly and corporeal realms is the way in which intelligible and sensible might intermingle, so that all things might "participate in the Good and nothing

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39 All three Cappadocians also emphasised the equality of the Trinitarian persons, a stress distancing their thought further from such stratified, hierarchical orderings of reality as we found in Plotinus for example. Other important differences from Platonism and Neoplatonism are a doctrine of creation (Plato arguing in the *Timaeus* for the eternity of matter) and (an at least verbal) rejection of the idea of souls falling from a pure bodiless condition to embodiment (such as we find in Plato's *Phaedrus*).

40 Balas, *Μετουσια Θεου*, p.53.

be deprived of a share in the higher nature" (*Or. cat.* 6, 2: Sr. p.30, 7-9: 45, 25C). Thus the role of the human being in establishing the communion of creation with God can be seen. Gregory illustrates the sort of participation he has in view and a sense of hierarchical ordering by picturing the mind as a mirror of archetypal Beauty and nature as a mirror of this mirror (*De hom. op.* 12, 44, 161C-D). In this way Gregory builds up a hierarchy of participation which we have seen expressed before in different ways by Plato, Plotinus, Origen and others.

It is however mainly in the context of God's relation to His creatures that we find Gregory using the theme of participation. A number of elements of his thought on the theme are brought out in his work *Contra Eunomium* (see esp. *CE* I, ch. 22). Gregory writes that;

> since the source and origin and supply of every good is found in the Uncreated nature, and the whole creation inclines toward It, attaining to and partaking of (*metechousa*) the lofty nature through the communion (*koinonia*) of the First Good; therefore, by necessity, proportionately to the participation (*metousias*) of the lofty goods - insofar namely as some are partaking (*metalambanonton*) more and others less according to the freedom of their will - the more and the less is discerned in the creation, proportionately to the desire of each (*CE* I 274: I, p.106, 16-23: 45, 333C-D).

Gregory is careful to underline the difference in the mode of possession of such goodness[41] between God and creatures. For Gregory participation implies the secondary, dependent, derived possession of a quality or perfection such as goodness, God's possession of such qualities being essential in contrast. Emphasising this Gregory, like Origen and others before him, also contrasts God's possession of qualities with those participating in such qualities by speaking of God as (for example) *autoagathotes, autozoe,* and *autoaletheia.*

In the passage (*CE* I 274: I, p.106, 16-23: 45, 333C-D) quoted above Gregory speaks of "more or less", of a greater or lesser degree of participation. Three points are important here. First, participation in a perfection implies a limit on that perfection, whereas the unparticipated perfection is infinite (in the sense not of unlimited duration or boundless power, but in the sense of intensive perfection). Second, the different degrees of perfection of human beings

41 Goodness in Gregory is understood here primarily in the sense of religious and moral goodness, although Gregory sometimes applies the term in a manner which suggests it includes all perfections.

depend on their different degrees of participation which depend on their different degrees of choosing "the lofty goods". Thus the appropriate use of freedom is essential if creatures are to participate in the divine perfections.[42] Thirdly, because the "more or less" does not apply to that which is participated, it cannot be the case that God's perfections are diminished by their being participated in.

When Gregory writes of participation in the divine perfections he tends to mean the participation of our created, intelligible nature. This nature stands on the borderline of the good and its contrary, capable of moving either way depending on its free choice. Given the similarities with Origen at this point, we might wonder how Gregory avoids the prospect of future falls. Gregory does manage to avoid Origen's weakness, by understanding the creature's participation of "more or less" not in a static way but in a dynamic way. Gregory writes that our created intelligible nature is

> constantly being created, ever changing for the better in its growth in perfection, so that... no limit can be found, nor can its progressive growth be limited by any term, but its present state of perfection, no matter how great and perfect it may seem, is always merely the beginning of a greater and superior stage (*In cant.* 6: VI, p.173, 11-13: 44, 885C).

Further " participation in the good not only permits a limitless progress , but actually consists in perpetual growth, a continuous 'change for the better'".[43] We are continually being drawn on to a greater and deeper participation, participation in virtue dilating the capacity for more virtue, our desire ever increasing as we progress.[44] Such eternal progress does not imply continual frustration or dissatisfaction but is indicative rather of the infinite nature of God, so that "no limit would interrupt growth in the ascent to God, since no limit to the Good can be found nor is the increasing of desire for the Good brought to an

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[42] Gregory remarks that "we are in some manner our own parents, giving birth to ourselves by our own free choice in accordance with whatever we wish to be.." (*De vita Mos.* II,3), admonishing us to that state where "all the movements of our soul are shepherded, like sheep, by the will of guiding reason" (*De vita Mos.* II,18).

[43] Balas, *Μετουσια Θεου*, p.137.

[44] G.C.Stead believes Gregory to see this progression also in terms of an *advance* in being, "by gaining an ever-increasing participation, *μετουσια,* in God who is the absolute being and the absolute goodness". See "Ontology and Terminology in Gregory of Nyssa" in his *Substance and Illusion in the Christian Fathers* (London: Variorium Reprints, 1985), p.116. This need not entail a transcendence of creaturely parameters so long as we understand that "for a thing to exist is for it to conform to the pattern of existence laid down for it by its creator", ibid., p.116. This is a dynamic vocation, not a static reality.

end because it is satisfied" (*De vita Mos.* II, 239). The infinite nature of the divine is the basis for humanity's perpetual self-transcendence and increasing participation. The momentum of our participation in God carries us forward and increases the resolve with which we pursue a deeper participation in God, the dynamic perfecting us in the process for "the perfection of human nature consists perhaps in its very growth in goodness" (*De vita Mos.* I,10), cf. Phil. 3:13.

It should be pointed out that God's boundlessness not only implies an eternal progression towards perfection in those who participate in God, but it also relates to God's ultimate unknowability and transcendence. Participation in God is a constant ascent because it is impossible finally to exhaust God or comprehend Him[45], and God always remains greater than any knowledge we have of Him. At one point Gregory writes that "we know that God is but not what God is" (*De vita Mos.* I, 47), suggesting that the essence of God is impenetrable to human understanding, although His existence is manifested by His action in the world. In *De vita Moysis* more generally, Gregory describes the spiritual ascent of Moses as characterised by God's revelation first in light, then in cloud and finally darkness, a typology echoed and amplified in later apophatic mysticism. None of this is to suggest Gregory understands the ascent of the soul simply in epistemological terms. Although his earlier writings betray an understanding of virtue as largely the way to knowledge, Gregory's more mature writings indicate a dialectic between virtue and knowledge such that knowledge also moves us to greater moral perfection (and indeed to deeper desire and contemplation).

The potential human beings have for eternal progress rests in their capacity for participation in God which is the purpose for which God created them (*De hom. op.* 16: esp. 44, 184A-D). We are able to participate in the divine goods because of our similarity to God, just as the eyes must have some innate brightness in order to partake of light claims Gregory (*De an. et res.* 5, 4: Sr.

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[45] Meredith sees Gregory motivated in part here by the Eunomian contention that the divine nature could be adequately defined. Against this Gregory appears to argue that God's goodness knows no bounds and is thus infinite, and is thus incomprehensibly excellent. This involves a radical departure from the Platonic view that to be unlimited was to be strictly unknowable and therefore somehow defective, but it also involved the somewhat questionable "leap from not being in principle receptive of improvement from outside to being infinite". See his *The Cappadocians* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), p.66.

p.22,16-23, 3: 45, 21C). What enables our participation is our rational nature together with our freedom so that, despite the sullying of the image of God in the fall, we are still able to partake of the divine goodness.

But this participation becomes an ontological possibility only in and through Christ and again we can see Platonic influences on Gregory here. Gregory believed that "evil was mixed with our nature from the beginning... through those who by their disobedience introduced the disease" (*De beat, or. 6)* , so that although human will remains free and we are thus responsible for our acts, we inevitably sin and have sin grow in us in our fallen state (see e.g. *De orat. dom.* or.5). Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection restores human nature permanently to its pristine disease-free state, the second Adam showing the way to a proper exercising of freedom and opening up the ontological possibility of our own participation in God. Platonic realism undergirds Gregory's thinking here, human nature in its entirety having been affected by Christ's work:

> (the Lord) conjoined Himself with our nature in order that by its conjunction with the Godhead it might become divine, being exempted from death and rescued from the adverse tyranny. For His triumphal return from death inaugurated the triumphal return of the human race to life immortal (*Or. cat.* 25).

Not that our participation in God is automatically achieved as the fruits of Christ's labours, but the ontological ground for a progressive participation in God is established, a ground which denies the option for non-being in an ultimate sense. Our participation is now enabled but depends for its progressive realisation on the union of ourselves with Christ through the sacraments and by the Christ-like exercise of freedom and love, a union no longer disabled by the effects of the fall because of Christ's work. Our freedom rightly exercised is the key to progressive participation for Gregory, so vital in fact that at times it seems that Gregory sees freedom as (almost) constituting the whole of God's image in us. (In relation to this it might be noted that Gregory often casts Christ in the role of Revealer rather than Mediator). Rightly used, such freedom is exercised in the loving pursuit of God, the (remodelled) Platonic motif of *eros* peppering works such as *On the Christian Life* and *On Virginity.*

Because of Christ's work the capacity of the image of God in us is restored. Gregory often describes this image as a mirror, conversion restoring our

capacity to reflect the divine nature. If a person turns to the good by means of free, rational choice "it is as if he places his own soul, like a mirror, face to face with the hope of good things, with the result that the images and impressions of virtue, as it is shown to him by God, are imprinted on the purity of his soul" (*De vita Mos.* II, 47). Gregory also uses the language of archetype and image in describing the relation of God to participants in goodness (e.g. CE II 89: I, p.252, 29: 45, 940D). But Gregory also uses this language in describing the Son's relation to the Father (e.g. *CE* I, 531: I, p.180, 9-10: 45, 416A). This is not to say however that Gregory understands the Son to participate in the Father in the fashion in which creatures participate in God, because for Gregory the Son is the perfect image of the Father, distinguished from those who only partake of goodness by being *phusei kalon* (cf. *CE* III, VI 56-57). Participation in God is open-ended, always providing for the possibility of greater participation in God whereas with the Son, who is already and eternally the perfect image of the Father, no such dynamic of ascent is involved.

3.5 The Cappadocian Contribution

Considering the contribution of the Cappadocian idea of participation more broadly we should first call attention to their development of Greek ontology. Athanasius' ontology made it difficult for him to say how exactly the otherness of the Son was contained within the substance of the Godhead, a point it was necessary to make if the Son's divine equality with the Father was to be protected and the Son's distinctive relationship with the Father was to be maintained. The ontology of the Cappadocians overcame Athanasius' difficulty by beginning to understand the term *hypostasis* no longer in terms of *ousia* alone but also in terms of *prosopon*, a relational term originally foreign to the sphere of ontology. The *hypostasis*, the bearer of the nature in its totality, is thus no longer understood in isolation as self-existent, but, Zizioulas claims, "since 'hypostasis' is identical with Personhood and not with substance, it is not in its 'self-existence' but in *communion* that this being is *itself* and thus *is at all*".[46]

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[46] J.D.Zizioulas, 'Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood' in *SJT* Vol.28 (1975), p.409. It might be argued that Zizioulas is engaged in special pleading concerning the identification of hypostasis and personhood because at times the Cappadocians see hypostasis as a *compound* of *ousia* and person. However the underlying point still stands, that personhood and relationality take on a key ontological status with the Cappadocians, a status stressing the originary nature of personhood and relationality in constituting the structure of God's *ousia*. What is vital to appreciate from the Cappadocian understanding is the ontologically and logically inseparable link of person and substance.

Zizioulas puts his finger on the key issue here, although at times he perhaps misleads the reader into assuming a clarity and consistency to the Cappadocian authors which is not always present. Even so, for God to be is for God to be in relation (*schesis*), communion between distinct persons constituting the Godhead. (See for example Gregory of Nazianzus' *Theological Oration* (section 16)). The Cappadocians were fond of the ontological epigram *mia ousia, treis hypostaseis*, which stressed both the threeness of God in terms of particular hypostases and the oneness of God in terms of the substance constituted in virtue of the communion of the hypostases (a communion itself constitutive of the hypostases).[47] If God's being is a being-in-relation then the relationships themselves are of vital import And this brings in to focus the central significance of ecstasis for ontology. God's being is identical with an act of communion, an act of ecstasis involving the hypostasising of persons as persons;

> the person in its ekstatic character reveals its being in a *catholic*, i.e. integral and undivided, way, and thus in its being ekstatic it becomes *hypostatic*, i.e. the bearer of its nature in its totality.[48]

This relational understanding of *ousia* enables us to think of the otherness of the Son and Spirit within the Godhead, homoousion with the Father. The gulf between created and uncreated which Gregory is so keen to emphasise is underlined by this view of substance, where the divine persons are homoousios and substantially distinct from the creaturely realm. To retain such a distinction 'participation' cannot be understood in a substantial sense where human beings are concerned. Indeed we would suggest that one of the main points made in stating that God is an *ousia* in a categorical sense is that it claims "that God is not limited or prescribed by our own experience of Him, but exists in His own right... To characterise God as a substance is to stake a claim against reductionist theories which in effect represent God as dependent on human experience which He is invoked to explain".[49] Substance-talk seeks in part to

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[47] T.F.Torrance argues that Gregory of Nazianzus adopts the originally Athanasian distinction between "*ousia* as referring to being in its internal relations and *hypostasis* as being in its objective relations." See his *Trinitarian Perspectives* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), p.28. It is perhaps less important to argue endlessly about who is given credit for the onto-relational understanding of person and the constitutive nature of relations in structuring (the divine)*ousia* than it is to grasp the enduring importance and significance of such insights.

[48] J.Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity", p.408. Zizioulas goes on, "*Ekstasis* and *hypostasis* represent two basic aspects of Personhood, and it is not to be regarded as a mere accident that both of these words have been historically applied to the notion of Person". Ibid.

[49] G.C.Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: OUP,1977), p.273.

retain God's independence from creation and His creatures, it seeks to stress God's limitlessness, His uncontainability and His transcendence of creation.

One way of developing these ideas is by understanding the divine persons as related in an eternal *perichoretic* union, a relationship ontologically distinct from our relationship of participation in God. The distinctiveness lies in the fact that perichoresis involves a unity understood as ontological interpenetration mutually constituting the divine persons (a substantial constitution) whereas participation involves a one-way dependence which stresses God's role in realising and sustaining human beings but where there is no substantial identity[50] . It is Gregory of Nazianzus who first gave an account of the intra-trinitarian perichoresis as mutual containment and interpenetration grounding rather than undermining personal distinctions.[51] (This *perichoresis* can allow for the economic taxis of the Trinity without suggesting inequalities within the Trinity). Both perichoresis and participation can be understood dynamically, Gregory of Nyssa making room for God's transcendence and our development by understanding the dynamic of participation as "a ceaseless growing into what is always and already greater and does not itself either grow or diminish: the fullness of the divine eludes us because it is further 'back' than our furthest and remotest origins, and beyond all imaginable futures".[52]

That Gregory was keen to distinguish created and uncreated realms within this framework can be seen by his transformation of the Platonic notion of participation whereby he focuses primarily not on the sensible/intelligible

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[50] Writing of the divine persons, Hilary explained that 'although these Beings do not dwell apart, they retain their separate existence and condition and can reciprocally contain one another, so that One permanently envelopes, and is also permanently enveloped by, the Other whom he yet envelopes'. *De Trinitate* 3.1. Because God is both without and within all things Hilary claims there is a sense to this mutual containing which there would not be with natural objects. T.F.Torrance notes that perichoresis derives from *chorein* meaning both 'to make room' and 'to contain'; "thus developed, the notion of *perichoresis* has an active nuance as mutual movement as well as mutual indwelling, which gives expression to the dynamic nature of the consubstantial Communion between the three divine Persons, in which their differentiating properties instead of separating them actually serve their oneness with one another". See his *Trinitarian Perspectives*, p.141.

[51] Gregory Nazianzus, *Oratio* 18.42; 22.4; *Epistula* 101.6. In their eagerness to refute the charge of tritheism Gregory of Nyssa and Basil argued for the Father's *Monarchia* and even argued for interrelations between the divine persons which built a kind of chain of dependence between the Persons. Gregory of Nazianzus was rightly alarmed by such thought which could easily suggest a divine hierarchy militating against the equality of the divine Persons. (For references see T.F.Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives*, pp.31-32.)

[52] Williams *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, p.243.

realms but on the created/uncreated realms. In Gregory

> instead of serving to construct the descending hierarchy within the divine world, as in later Platonism, it (participation) serves to exclude any intermediary nature between the Uncreated and Created beings. The transposition effects also the content of the notion, even on a purely philosophical level. Its negative implications (causal dependence,composition, change, temporality) are more clearly developed; at the same time it has received a more personal and dynamic character. New is also the realisation of the connection between participation and limitation, especially between essential possession and positive infinity.[53]

This distinction of created and uncreated helped ensure that his notion of participation did not lead to the removal of creatureliness through sharing in the divine life, but rather led to seeing participation as the dynamic involving the continual pushing back of fallen creaturely limits allowing us to be who we were meant to be:

> the partaking of the divine perfections is both the foundation and the unfolding of the Image of God in man; lost by sin, it is restored fundamentally by our sacramental and moral participation of Redemption in Christ. Spiritual life consists in an ever growing participation of Divine Goodness, i.e. in an infinite progress of our knowledge of and union with God; and this progress is to continue to all eternity.[54]

Remarks such as those above help answer those critics who see in the notion of participation an assimilation of human nature into the divine nature without remainder. Gregory and the other Cappadocians also sought to protect God's transcendence together with the reality of our involvement with God using the terminology of essence and energies. Observing the tension between the scriptural assertion that the pure in heart will see God (Mt. 5:8) and St. Paul's assertion that "no one ever saw or can see God" (1 Tim. 6:16), Gregory commented that "He who by nature is invisible becomes visible through his energies, appearing in what is around him".[55] The essence of God is unknowable and unnameable whereas we are able to participate in the energies or movement (*kinesis*) of God ad extra. (Essence here refers to the quidditas of God, energy refers to the manner, way or activity of God ad extra). A common criticism of this terminology is that it suggests we do not have any contact with God as God essentially is, but rather have to do with a secondary reality, God's energies. But if we understand the energy of God as God as He essentially is in His movement towards us and if we accept the link between

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53 Balas, *Μετουσια Θεου*, p.163.

54 Balas, *Μετουσια Θεου*, p.161.

55 In J.Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 1975), p.94.

epistemology and ontology implicit in Cappadocian theology, then this criticism loses some of its force. As creatures we do not have epistemic access to the essence of God, such epistemic access depending on an ontological (perichoretic) union whose reality would remove those parameters defining our creatureliness. Such epistemic access as we do have is grounded in the ontological difference between creature and Creator and is respectful of this difference. Thus participation in God's energies implies a true knowledge and relation with God as He is, but one which maintains an ontological (and epistemological) distance between God and his creatures. As Zizioulas puts it, "with the help of apophatic theology we may say that, although the Economic Trinity is the Immanent Trinity, the Immanent Trinity is not exhausted by the Economic Trinity".[56] Where there is room for confusion is in remarks such as the following from Georgios Mantzaridis; "..God as existence can come into contact and communion with men and yet remain non-participable and inaccessible to them as essence".[57] The point we are making is that God, of His own gracious will *is* participable, but that this participation is distinct from the perichoretic union of the divine persons. The self-constituting nature of the perichoretic union makes it appropriate to refer to the essence of God in the context of the perichoretic union but not (given that creation is unnecessary to God) in the context of creation's participation in God. On this understanding 'essence' is not indicative of some substance in which the Trinitarian persons share but denotes rather the singular nature of the intra-divine communion of persons, this communion *being* the essence of God.

The ontology of the Cappadocians has enabled us to understand substance relationally and provides the means of distinguishing between the Trinitarian perichoresis and our participation in God. Even though Gregory lapses occasionally (and somewhat confusingly) into speaking of the Son's participation in the Father, that he was aware of the distinction between our relation with God and those relations within the Trinity is clear from his apophatic emphases, the language of essence and energies and his stress on understanding our relation to God as one of non-substantial participation. Such participation includes the notions of dependence, infinite development,

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[56] J.D.Zizioulas, 'The Doctrine of God the Trinity Today: Suggestions for an Ecumenical Study', in *The Forgotten Trinity*, ed, A.I.C.Heron (London: BCC, 1991), p.24.

[57] G.I.Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man* (New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 1984), p.106

intellectual, ethical and sacramental progress. Gregory himself did not develop these insights in such a way as to bring into bold relief perichoretic and participatory relations but such a contrast promises to be a fruitful way forward in discussing participation. We should also mention that Gregory's thought is not without its drawbacks. It might be asked of him whether he has undermined the significance of the eschaton by stressing the on-going development of participation beginning at baptism. Further, his Platonic realism taken together with his stress on the individual's progressive participation seem to lead away from the Biblical notion of participation as including a sense of corporate solidarity. But even taking these points into account, Gregory's theology and that of the Cappadocians more generally mark a considerable advance in developing the notion of participation.

3.6 Augustine

If Augustine is often portrayed as a theologian concerned with the depths to which human beings have fallen through sin, he is also concerned with the heights to which human beings may be raised by God's grace and it is in relation to the latter that Augustine writes of participation (and indeed deification). With Augustine we see both important continuities and differences from the theologians we have already considered. Augustine's use of 'deification' reminds us once more that such terminology is not to be immediately dismissed as indicative of elevating the creature beyond his rightful place and an infringement of God's transcendence. Rather the term can indicate our access in and through the humanity of Christ to that relation with the triune God which is so utterly beyond us apart from grace, and which so far surpasses our comprehension and expectation as to be worthy of such radical denotation.[58] Apart from Christ's Incarnation we would in our fallenness be unable to realise our capacity for God, and only through Christ are such capabilities reformed (See e.g. *De Trin.* IV, 2,4). But if Incarnation opens up the way for participation in God and deification, how does Augustine see human

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58 "We too were made by his grace what we were not, that is, sons of God. Yet we were something else, and this much inferior, that is sons of men. Therefore he descended that we might ascend, and remaining in his nature was made a partaker (*particeps*) of our nature, that we remaining in our nature might be made partakers (*participes*) of his nature. But not simply this; for his participation (*participatio*) in our nature did not make him worse, while participating in his nature makes us better " (*ep.* 140.4, 10).

beings realising that goal? One central requirement is belonging to the Church:

> All who are reborn are made His members, and Christ alone who is born of Mary is one Christ, and with His Body the one Christ is the Head. Therefore it was His will to say: *No man hath ascended into heaven but He that descended out of heaven.* No man has therefore ascended except Christ. If you wish to ascend, be in the Body of Christ (*Serm.* 294,10,10).

It is in the Church that we partake of the likeness of Christ's humanity so that through baptism it becomes possible for us to have our deformity healed (cf. *In Ep. Iohan. Tr.* 5,6). Not that participation is automatic for Augustine upon baptism (as is the remission of sins), but faith to the end of the baptised member's life can assure the Christian of reformation to the image of God and deification (*De Trin.* XIV,17,23). To understand the importance of the Church here we need to remember that for Augustine our fallenness is not simply the consequence of our individual irresponsibility but also a result of our common humanity as derived from Adam, whose sin of pride in turning away from God to himself deformed humanity collectively. So as Bonner notes "it was from the notion of the coinherence of fallen humanity in Adam that Augustine derived his vision of the coinherence of redeemed humanity in the Body of Christ".[59]

But such a redemption does not restore us to that relationship with God which is our true fulfilment in itself, rather it provides us with sure ground to build on. Apart from such ground our efforts to reach God will lead either to despair because of our sinfulness or an ascent corrupted (and thus flawed) by pride. The Incarnation, embodying as it does God's graceful humility, enables human beings to be persuaded to that humility appropriate to their station and propitiatory to their ascent.[60] The humility of Christ in his Incarnation gives the clue to the way we realise our participation in God through Christ and that participation has intellectual, spiritual, moral and aesthetic dimensions. To begin[61] with the way of participation involves a movement of introversion (as well as acts of charity and obedience), the acquiring of true self-knowledge,

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[59] G.Bonner, *God's Decree and Man's Destiny* (London: Variorium Reprints, 1987), article III, p.502.

[60] Augustine often writes as if the humility of Christ is the most striking feature of the Incarnation, see e.g. *Ep. ad Gal. exp., 24.*

[61] Our participation 'begins' for Augustine with our creation in effect, a participation not entirely lost through the Fall (*De Civ. Dei* XIV,13). Our "sharing" in being is not however a sharing in God's essence. Augustine distinguishes our being from God's being because ours is a derived being; "heaven and earth are *from* God because He made them; but they are not *of* Him, since they are not of His substance" (*On the Nature of the Good* I).

because only so can a human being have a proper idea of the image of God in himself, and only so can a human being come to love God, through loving the image of God within. This is why it is important for Augustine to discern a Trinity within the human being because (given his belief in a Trinitarian God), only a Trinitarian image within the human being can be a true image of God which can lead us on in our ascent to God. Augustine considers the Trinity of *mens, notitia,* and *amor* (mind, knowledge and love, cf. *De Trin.* IX) before focussing on what he sees to be the more precise model in the *mens* of memory, understanding and will (*De Trin.* X). Once Augustine has established the Trinitarian image in the human being to his own satisfaction, he turns to consider the importance of this image in our return to God.

The Trinitarian image within us is not the end in itself but it points to the God who created us according to his image and with a capacity for Him:

> the reason why there is this image of the Trinity in the soul is not because it remembers and knows and loves itself, but because in this it manifests its capacity to remember, know and love Him by whom it has been made.[62]

The image of God within us reveals our capacity for God and the ability to participate in God (cf. *De Trin.* XIV, 8, 11) and it is as we realise this capacity through God's grace and our cleaving to God through memory, will and understanding that "the mind will be raised to the participation of his being, truth and bliss..." (*De Trin.* XIX, 14, 20).

While Augustine exhorts Christians to love their neighbours as part and parcel of this discipleship, there is still ample room here to see in Augustine's remarks the disciplined Neoplatonist pursuing the *Summum Bonum* by way of 'Christian' relations with others, culminating finally in the *individual* joining that elect band who have also demonstrated single-minded dedication to the Good. Perhaps this individualistic emphasis relates to Augustine's ontology, lacking as it does that aspect of Cappadocian ontology which sees relations as having ontological significance. (Here too we can see the limits of understanding the image of God in an individualistic way, without essential reference to relationships other than archetype-ectypyal relations, and perhaps a clue to a better, relational definition of the image of God within *us*).

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62 Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, p.156.

On a more positive note, Augustine's understanding of free will leads us away from seeing free will as a kind of freedom from constraint or freedom of choice to a view which regards us as only being truly free in so far as we are turned to God in charity, obedience and contemplation. In this way our participation in God is based on God's (sustained) initiative, we are not regarded as participating in God in so far as we are free from constraint (which may involve trespassing creaturely boundaries), and our participation is not grounded in some autonomous will but in the graceful God who confirms and establishes our freedom. Of course Augustine pushed this notion too far in his enthusiasm for predestination, an enthusiasm fuelled perhaps by an awareness of his own desperate need of external aid and anxiety concerning the infinite depths of his inner world.[63] But we will consider human freedom in a way which could be described as a tempered notion of Augustine's view of free-will in our discussions of participation later, and so seek to build on the virtues of his notion, alert to the danger of crushing human autonomy.

3.7 Pseudo-Dionysius

Many of the theologians omitted from this brief survey of the use of 'participation' in the patristic period echo meanings and theological concerns of those already mentioned. To give an example before moving on we might consider Pseudo-Dionysius (hereafter Dionysius). Dionysius' notion of participation is central to his thought and his treatment of the theme recalls many points from the earlier patristic history of the term. Participation in God is not to be understood as involving the division or diminishment of God, just as it is not an infringement of the divine transcendence. Participation depends upon the participant's capacity for participation and the receptivity of participants though it is initiated by the overflowing goodness of God. But peculiar to Dionysius is the detailed construction of triadic hierarchies through which God's revelation reaches us and by which we are lifted up to a greater participation in God (We already participate in God in a sense because of our *being*). These hierarchies channel the divine light down the hierarchies, illuminating the entire structure and enabling the possibility of likeness to God. But this need not imply (*pace* Meyendorff)) that our ascent is only achieved by way and mediation of the hierarchies because there is also in Dionysius an emphasis on the

63 See P.Brown's *Augustine of Hippo* (California: University of California, 1967) p.178, p.407.

immediacy of an ecstatic, loving relationship with the divine in the particularity of each hierarchical position. As such it is paradoxically through conforming to one's position in the hierarchy and loving God in that particularity that one can ecstatically go 'beyond' the hierarchy in participating in God and be 'divinised'. The value of this approach is that it allows for a diversity of ways in which participation in God (and divinisation) can come about starting from many different hierarchical positions. As such it provides possibilities for overcoming the dangers of intellectual elitism, spiritual snobbery and the homogenisation of society. Negatively the approach may lend itself to a religious and sociopolitical quietism which accepts the status quo and one's position in it as divinely ordained.

But more disturbing than problems associated with the Dionysian hierarchies is the (lack of a) place for creation in the participation envisaged by the Areopagite. (And again this weakness echoes weaknesses of earlier theologians such as Justin Martyr). When Dionysius uses symbolic theology to take aspects of the sensible realm as signifying elements of the divine realm he leaves himself open to the charge that in his thought this is the only worth of the sensible realm. So Meyendorff argues that "no tangible, ritual, or material reality can.. according to Dionysius, have any other relationship with the intelligible world than a symbolic one".[64] In favour of Meyendorff's view is the fact that the Eucharist symbolises "the union of our minds with God and with Christ ... Dionysius never formally presents Eucharistic communion as a participation in the body and blood of Christ".[65] Further the Dionysian hierarchies reflect the ascent from the realm of sense to that of intelligibles as Meyendorff points out. Even though we might argue that our ascent to God is not primarily up the hierarchy but into the hierarchy for Dionysius, this does not completely clear Dionysius of the charge brought by Meyendorff because Dionysius may still be operating with a Platonic sense-intelligible distinction when considering the participation of a particular member of the hierarchy in the divine. That this participation is understood in terms of the quest for spiritual knowledge which involves (finally) the negating of our 'symbolic knowledge' of the world in God and that this quest results finally in an ecstasis in which everything perceived

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64 Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, p.106.

65 R.Roques, *L'univers dionysien. Structure hierarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys* (Paris: Aubier, 1954), p.269.

and understood is left behind and in which union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge is sought (*Mystical Theology* I), all of this suggests that creation in the end has very little to say to the quester and vice versa. For Dionysius creation turns out to be no more than the means to an end, the end resembling more the Platonic heaven of intelligibles than that eschatological state envisaged by Paul when creation itself will be liberated for its true fulfilment (Rom. 8:21f).

3.8 Conclusion: Issues Arising

A number of other theologians from the Patristic period could be mentioned but enough ground has been covered already to suggest some of the major doctrinal issues surrounding the notion of participation. These issues will provide a focus for our treatment of the notion as we trace its development through a particular strand of theological thought to the present-day. Such issues include ontology. We saw how Origen's thought marks a certain raising of awareness of the ontological issues involved, finally failing however to reconcile the 'worlds' of Being and Becoming. The difficulties in reconciling such worlds will exercise us later in this study, both in ontological terms and in terms of relating the 'philosophical' attributes of God (e.g. eternal, immutable, impassible), with the God of personal agency known in and through Jesus Christ (as loving, merciful, righteous etc.)

A second, related ontological issue raised particularly by a consideration of Origen's use of participation is the relations of the persons of the Godhead. Origen suggests that while the Son 'participates' in the Father, this is in a manner qualitatively different to the way in which creatures might participate in the Godhead. For Arius however it seems to have been essential to distinguish the Father from the Son more clearly than the somewhat ambiguous term 'participation' allowed for. But finally Arius' thinking suggests to us that perhaps the Son is found between the realm of Becoming to which we creatures belong and the realm of Being to which the Father belongs, an ontologically unstable creature "yet perfectly in communion with the realm of Being, morally stable by the confluence of God's prior grace and his own unfaltering response". Such a notion was unacceptable to those such as Athanasius who saw the

fundamental importance of the divinity of the Son in enabling our salvation. In asserting the consubstantiality of Father and Son together with their distinctiveness Athanasius appeared to be moving towards an understanding of God's substance which implied that substance possesses almost by definition a relational character. The Cappadocians' insights allowed for the development of an understanding of the relational character of substance and in their thought we can begin to see a distinction between the intra-divine perichoresis and the divine-human participation. This distinction safeguarded God's transcendence and distinguished the Son's relation to the Father from human relations with the Godhead. Again, as we proceed we will need to pay careful attention to the continuities and contrasts between the Trinitarian relations ad intra and the relations ad extra, with particular reference to the transcendence/immanence and otherness/relatedness of God and creation.

The question of what exactly the early Church Fathers suggest we are participating in is connected with the understanding of relation as having substantial importance. The difficulties of those such as Justin Martyr and Origen (who are in danger of presenting monist ontologies) are surmounted by an understanding of our relatedness to God carrying ontic weight, so that the new relationship established in Christ provides the grounds of an ontologically different creation which participates in God through a specific relatedness and ways of relating which need not imply a substantial sharing of God's essence. While theologians such as Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine use the language of deification in writing of human participation in God, this does not mean abandoning parameters appropriate to our dependent, derived existence as creatures but implies the glorification of our humanity as embodied in the humanity of Jesus Christ. Here the image of God is important because it is the understanding of human creatures as being in the image of God which enables Origen, Gregory and Augustine (for example) to explain how it is that the possibility of participation in God is open to human beings. One issue arising from this understanding concerns the reformation of the image of God and how far we effectively become like Christ as the reformation is realised and how far Christ becomes irrelevant as our participation proceeds. We shall argue presently that certain difficulties can be circumvented here if participation in God be understood as being enabled and sustained by Christ where Christ is

understood *both* in terms of his work and his person.

The place of sacramental participation has been touched on in this chapter but requires further exploration, especially given the dangers of semi-mechanical conceptions of participation or anti-materialistic tendencies which can arise if such participation is not described carefully. Again, if participation is not an automatic consequence of Christ's work, the question of the place of our works in participating in God comes to the fore. Augustine so stresses the primacy of God's uplifting grace as to lose at times any sense of the value of human responsiveness or response-ability yet he rightly emphasises the priority of God's action and the secondary, responsive nature of human actions. Ways of understanding human freedom as built on and responsive to divine freedom might help develop that dimension of Patristic thought (evident for example in Origen) which understood that both human and divine freedom must be given their due if the integrity of both Creator and creature are not to be undermined. Further, our responsiveness weaves together intellectual, spiritual, moral and erotic strands and temptations to omit one or more of these strands must be avoided if we are to be true to that tradition within the early Church Fathers (and scripture) which understood participation as involving the *whole* human being.

The participation of the whole human being could be taken as somewhat individualistic (as it sometimes seems to be in Augustine and Origen) if we fail to stress the importance of relationships horizontally (as well as vertically) in making a person who s/he is. This communal stress most clearly distinguishes Platonic and Pauline participation, and it also invites the notion of the Church as that place in particular where participation occurs, as Augustine suggests for example. However, membership of the Church need not imply participation in Christ in itself for Augustine, and wider issues arising from this include the questions of who is the 'participating' Church and whether participation in Christ occurs outside the realm of the Church and if it does, would that in any way undermine the Church's being and work? Finally the question of the relationship between individual, Church and world must be considered in relation to the notion of participation. The Platonic anti-materialist thrust to the notion of participation finds some echoes in certain of the early Fathers such as Dionysius and Augustine but there is also to be found in theologians such as Gregory of Nyssa the idea that through human beings authentically executing

their delegated authority over creation, creation is 'lifted up' to partake of the divine glory, being transfigured in the process. Undergirding such an idea would appear to be the hierarchy of levels we saw first in Platonic thought, but whereas in Platonic thought the aim is to ascend through the distinct levels, here creation, creature and Creator retain their distinctiveness while the former are fulfilled in realising relations to the Creator (in Christ through the Spirit) appropriate to their createdness. We will develop this (non-pantheistic) understanding of creation's participation in God later.

4. PARTICIPATION IN THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN CALVIN

Calvin's many remarks concerning how our salvation has been achieved for us through Jesus Christ can cause us too easily to ignore another emphasis in his theology, namely the way in which our participation in this drama of salvation is of significance. This emphasis, together with important continuities with the thought of Fathers such as Gregory of Nazianzus (in for example aspects of his doctrine of the Trinity), make Calvin an appropriate theologian with whom to develop our discussion.[1] Recently a number of theologians have drawn attention to the somewhat neglected issue of participation in Calvin's thought[2] and our aim here will be to consider Calvin's notion of participation with particular reference to; the way in which the person of Christ grounds the notion; the relationship between human activity and divine activity, human and divine freedom in the working out of the notion; the way the connection between justification and sanctification is understood. In so doing we hope to demonstrate the fecundity of Calvin's thought for realising a contemporary understanding of the notion sensitive to a range of theological concerns.

At the beginning of Book II of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*[3] Calvin summarises the epistemological condition of the human being;

> First, he should consider for what purpose he was created and endowed with no mean gifts. By this knowledge he should arouse himself to meditation upon divine worship and the future life. Secondly, he should weigh his own abilities - or rather, lack of abilities. When he perceives this lack, he should lie prostrate in extreme confusion, so to speak, reduced to nought. The first consideration tends to make him recognise the nature of his duty; the second, the extent of his ability to carry it out[4].

Calvin focuses in Book II on the second aspect of the human condition, and thus

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1 See for example T.F.Torrance's 'The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity in Gregory Nazianzen and John Calvin', in his *Trinitarian Perspectives*, pp.21-40. While Calvin's appreciation of Augustine is well-known, in relation to Calvin's Trinitarian thought Torrance argues (perhaps *too* strongly) that "at every essential point the basic conceptions that Calvin wants to adduce come from Gregory, and from Gregory's theological hero Athanasius the Great". Ibid., p.22

2 E.g. Trevor Hart's 'Humankind in Christ and Christ in Humankind: Salvation as Participation in our Substitute in the Theology of John Calvin', *SJT* Vol.42 (1989), 67-84. Also J.B.Torrance's 'The Vicarious Humanity and Priesthood of Christ in the Theology of John Calvin' in *Calvinus Ecclesiae Doctor* (1978) 69-84, and other articles by Torrance.

3 Unless otherwise stated the Institutes referred to are the 1559 edition , Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21, ed. J.T.McNeill, trans. F.L.Battles (London: Westminster Press, 1960).

4 *Institutes* II.i.3

on the absolute need human beings have of God's unconditioned and primary intervention to save them. While elsewhere Calvin sees the danger of complacency and ethical quietism (e.g. *Institutes* II.ii.1), here the predominant point for Calvin is that we simply cannot achieve the 'good' without and apart from God:

> ..much as man desires to follow what is good, still he does not follow it. There is no man to whom eternal blessedness is not pleasing, yet no man aspires to it except by the impulsion of the Holy Spirit.[5]

The inability of human beings to bring about their own salvation is not a cause for dejection and despondency for Calvin because "we see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ (Acts 4:12)".[6] For Calvin "the whole of our salvation is not to be sought anywhere else than in Christ"[7] . Thus we can immediately see the central significance of Christology in Calvin's thought and it is with Calvin's Christology that we will begin to see how it is that our participation in Christ (through the Holy Spirit) comes about.

4.1 Christ and Human Participation in God

Calvin's christology stands within the orthodoxy of Chalcedon, both the divinity[8] and humanity[9] of Christ being affirmed in their fullness. The unity of Christ's person is stressed and Calvin is careful to steer a course between seeing the two natures as fused or as separated.[10] Calvin lists three particular aspects to Christ's salvific work; the prophetic office, kingship and priesthood. Calvin's treatment at this point recalls the way in which in Hebrews the relation between Christ and the church is understood in terms of participation in Christ's various roles. Of particular interest is Calvin's treatment of Christ's priestly role and our relation to it. Christ alone is able in his holiness to intervene as priest on our behalf to appease God's wrath and obtain God's favour. The sacrifice required for expiation of sins was Christ himself, who by the sacrifice of his death blotted

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5 *Institutes* II.ii.26

6 *Institutes* II.xvi.19

7 *Commentary on John* 3.16. Unless otherwise stated references to Calvin's commentaries are taken from *Calvin's Commentaries*, eds. T.F. & D.W. Torrance (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1959).

8 E.g. Institutes I.xiii.7-13

9 E.g. Institutes II.xiii.1-4

10 Institutes II.xiv.4

out humanity's guilt and made satisfaction for humanity's sins (cf. Heb. 9:22). By his priestly role Christ has given us access to the Father because through Christ we have had our sins washed away, Christ "sanctifies us and obtains for us that grace from which the uncleanness of out transgressions and vices debars us".[11] Further, Christ "justifies his rightful name of Priest by his continual task of intercession"[12] so that through Him our prayers may be received and in Him the Father is rendered "favourable and propitious toward us".[13] Calvin is emphatic that Christ is the only true priest, the single perpetual priest, that his is the one efficacious, unique sacrifice which assuages God's wrath and enables access to the Father. So too with Christ's mediatorship, "He (Paul) does not claim for Christ the honour of a mediator so that others may at the same time share it with Him, but he maintains that all the others were rejected when the office was placed upon Christ".[14] The church's priests are those who participate in the priesthood of Christ and only in the efficacy of Christ's expiation, sacrifice, propitiation and intercession are the church's priestly ministrations efficacious.[15]

A brief look at Calvin's description of Christ as prophet, king and priest might suggest to the reader that our salvation has *already* been wrought for us in Christ. Such a conclusion requires some qualification however because we find in Calvin both an emphasis on Christ's conclusive salvation of human beings and an emphasis on our 'growing into' this salvation. This can be seen for example in the way in which we are to enter into, participate in Christ's prophetic office, kingly power and priestly ministry. Even from the perspective of Christ as priest, where Christ has been shown to play the vital role in dealing with the sin and guilt of humanity, paying our debt and enabling a new fellowship for human beings with God through Himself, even here there is a 'prospective' dimension to salvation as well as a 'retrospective' dimension[16]:

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11 Institutes II.xvi.6

12 *Comm. on Hebrews* p.101; and further "..all prayers which are not supported by the intercession of Christ are rejected", ibid., p.102.

13 Institutes II.xi.6

14 *Comm. on Hebrews*, ibid., p.122

15 This line of thought immediately shows the significance of worship in understanding participation. Worship rendered to God is primarily worship rendered by the one true priest Jesus Christ, a continuing, vicarious activity into which we are drawn as participants who in Christ, through the Spirit are enabled to worship.

16 Hart notes that the terms 'retrospective atonement' and 'prospective atonement' are anachronistic in their application to Calvin, but he suggests that the substance of the distinction is clear in Calvin's writings, see his 'Humankind in Christ and Christ in Humankind', p.70.

atonement does not consist simply in a debt paid, or in the non-reckoning of sin and guilt alone. The wider context is a prospective one, the establishing of humanity in a new relationship with God, the exaltation of humanity to a previously unknown glory.[17]

Concerning this prospective dimension Calvin wrote that humankind is given to share in the sonship of Christ because, "becoming Son of Man with us, he has made us sons of God with him;... by his descent to earth, he has prepared an ascent to heaven for us;... by taking on our mortality, he has conferred immortality upon us.."[18]

Further, in relation to the retrospective/prospective dimensions of atonement it can be argued that Calvin distinguishes "that which Christ has done 'for us' (substitution) and that which he does 'in us' (participation)".[19] To justify this point one can argue (with Hart) that while Calvin does appear at times to suggest that Christ has done everything for us (thus potentially excluding the sense of an active participation of humanity in the grace of God), yet for Calvin 'substitution' or 'Christ for us' are not so much the final words as the primary words.[20] To see this more clearly we must analyse Calvin's understanding of salvation more closely.

An essential part of salvation for Calvin is the recreating of human nature in Christ. It is also vital that Christ's redemptive action is understood as being carried out "according to his human nature" because it is precisely the human righteousness of Christ that enables us as humans to stand justified before the throne of grace. We are in the first instance "clothed" with the righteousness of Christ, yet this does not imply a fictitious, weak or tenuous sharing of Christ's righteousness; "..you see that our righteousness is not in us but in Christ, that we possess it only because we are partakers in Christ; indeed, with him we possess all its riches".[21] Christ's humanity enables his substitution for us to be understood "not in any sense which excludes us from the reality of grace, but rather in such a way that we are implicated in all that he does and has and is".[22] So while the language of substitution has as a primary reference Christ, as the

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17 T.Hart, 'Humankind in Christ and Christ in Humankind', p.74

18 Institutes IV.xvii.2

19 Hart, ibid., p.70

20 Hart, ibid., p.76

21 Institutes III.xi.23

22 Hart, ibid., p.79.

human being who stands in the place of all others before the Father, there is a secondary reference whereby it applies to us, in that we are sanctified, obedient, perfect, righteous sons of God;

This is a present reality which rests on a past action. Yet we have not moved beyond the language of substitution in saying this, for what we are now we are only 'in Christ'.[23]

However there is also an application of the language of redemption in Calvin couched not in the past tense like the first two references, but couched in the present and future tenses and often in the imperative mood. Such a reference is subordinate to the other two and never separated from them. Hart explains:

this is not to deny its importance in any way, but rather to recognise that the 'sanctification' which we 'put on' in the Christian life is (a) something which we *already* possess, and (b) not a reality separate from Christ, but rather a participation in Christ, a result of *Christ* in us.[24]

The combination of these three references enable Calvin to be true to the biblical dialectic between the 'already' and the 'not yet' and their concurrence is clear in some of Calvin's statements such as the following concerning Christ:

we have been adopted unto him as sons and heirs by our heavenly Father (cf. Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:5-7); that we have been reconciled through his blood (Rom. 5:9-10);... that thus ingrafted into him (cf. Rom. 11:19) we are already, in a manner, partakers of eternal life, having entered in the Kingdom of God through hope. Yet more: we experience such participation in him that, although we are still foolish in ourselves, he is our wisdom before God, while we are sinners, he is our righteousness... In brief, because all things are ours and we have all things in him, in us there is nothing. Upon this foundation, I say, we must be built if we would grow into a holy temple to the Lord (cf. Eph. 2:21).[25]

There is here a sense of our becoming what we are in Christ, a becoming which is primarily but not necessarily entirely the work of Christ in us. This position steers a middle course between two dangerous extremes. With one extreme Christ is seen as having done everything for us, covering human beings with his righteousness, potentially turning grace into a fiction rather than making us really righteous. With the other extreme our active role in appropriating the new humanity established in Christ is stressed in a way which may endanger the complete sufficiency of Christ's once-for-all redemptive ministry. Both positions

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23 Hart, 'Humankind in Christ and Christ in Humankind', p.80

24 Hart, ibid., p.80

25 Institutes III.xv.6

can be understood as mistakenly separating Christ's work and person, so that salvation is defined for both in terms of humanity's participation in certain 'benefits' procured by Christ's work. Thus both views may be described as 'extrinsecist':

> one makes grace something external to our being, and the other tears it away from its ontological moorings in the humanity of the Saviour. Thus both ultimately rob his humanness of its true *mediatorial* significance.[26]

Calvin's theology does not separate Christ's person and work however, and the key here is the *humanity* of Christ which is not merely of instrumental value but which is the very substance of salvation; "He (Christ) is said to have made through this body a way to ascend into heaven because He consecrated Himself to God in that body"[27] ; Christ makes us "participants not only in all his benefits but also in himself"[28] . It is Christ in His very person who then reconciles human beings and God and in whose very person we share this reconciliation.[29] Because we are united to Christ by Christ's humanity, we are united to the human Son of God, and share in his human sonship.[30] Through our union with the humanity of Christ forged out by Christ we also share in the love of the Father for the Son; "..there is no danger that we shall be cut off from the love of God; for this foundation cannot be overturned - that we are loved because the Father has loved him".[31] Thus Calvin links our participation in the humanity of Christ with our participation in the life of the Triune God by arguing that our participation in Christ implies that we share in the same love of the Father for the Son and, empowered by the Spirit, reciprocate this love in our

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[26] Hart, ibid., p.69

[27] *Comm on Hebrews* p.120

[28] Institutes III.ii.24

[29] Hart notes the implications of rooting the self-giving of God in the *person* of Christ for ecumenism. A ' typical' Protestant understanding is criticised by some Catholics as presenting our justification rather like a cloak covering a corpse, whereas grace is a real gift, a justification making man *really* just. On the other hand the Catholic perspective is criticised for endangering the complete sufficiency of Christ's once-for-all redemptive ministry and for its high estimate of the redeemed individual who is yet sinful. By locating God's grace in the relation to the person of Christ however there is the possibility of overcoming this impasse. What Hart does not make sufficiently clear however is the kind of ontology which needs to underpin such a position. One such ontology would be akin to certain Cappadocian ideas outlined earlier which gives room for real ontic weight to be ascribed to our relatedness to Christ while allowing a distinction between the way we now are and the (hoped-for) eschatological conformity of our way of being to what we already are in relation to God in Christ.

[30] Institutes II.xii.2

[31] *Commentary on John* 17:23

filial obedience to the Father.

It might be argued that this analysis of Calvin's thought which is suggestive of our participation in the humanity of Christ still leaves open the question of whether Christ's 'substitution' is the final or the primary word in Calvin's theology. Are we simply adopted as sons and participators *because of* Jesus Christ or is this an adoption and participation which comes about *in* Jesus Christ, in whom we come to participate more and more by means of the Holy Spirit, for example? To see more clearly where Calvin stands on this question we must examine his theological anthropology and underlying ontological assumptions, in particular his doctrine of the *Imago Dei*.

4.2 The Imago Dei

God created us "after his image (Gen. 1:27) that he might arouse our minds both to zeal for virtue and to meditation upon eternal life".[32] The soul and its powers are the seat of the image for Calvin, conceived as 'mind and heart', although "there was no part of man, not even the body itself, in which some sparks did not glow".[33] Calvin explains what he means by calling the human being in respect of his soul God's image:

> the integrity with which Adam was endowed is expressed by this word, when he had full possession of right understanding, when he had his affections kept within the bounds of reason, all his senses tempered in the right order, and he truly referred his excellence to exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his Maker.[34]

Adam's fall was such that "even though we grant that God's image was not totally annihilated and destroyed in him, yet it was so corrupted that whatever remains is frightful deformity".[35] With Christ comes "the beginning of our recovery of salvation ... for the reason that he restores us to true and complete integrity"[36] ; Christ is described as our "prototype"[37] and He "rose for the

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[32] Institutes II.1.1

[33] Institutes I.xv.3.

[34] Institutes I.xv.3. (This statement shows Calvin's notion of soul to consist of two aspects, understanding, or the intellect, and will).

[35] Institutes I.xv.4

[36] Institutes I.xv.4. Further, "..the end of regeneration is that Christ should reform us to God's image", ibid.

[37] Institutes III.xxv.3

purpose of making us... partakers of the same glory with Himself".[38] The change which is wrought in Christ is not one that blurs the distinction between Creator and creatures for Calvin; our transformation is one of quality not essence and we are made to "conform to God, not by an inflowing of substance, but by the grace and power of the Spirit... who surely works in us without rendering us consubstantial with God".[39] And this regeneration is one involving our bodies as well as our souls[40] and the whole of creation as well as human creatures.[41]

Why then do those in whom the image has been restored continue to be tempted and to sin?

> ...this restoration does not take place in one moment or one day or one year; but through continual and sometimes even slow advances God wipes out in his elect the corruptions of the flesh, cleanses them of guilt, consecrates them to himself as temples renewing all their minds to true purity that they may practice repentance throughout their lives and know that this warfare will end only at death.[42]

So the process of renewal of the image of God in the elect is a gradual one and only at death will the renewal be effected fully. (In this way Calvin argues against those such as Servetus who taught a form of 'realised eschatology'[43]). It is the Holy Spirit who is involved in this temporal process of renewal, a renewal founded and effected in Christ as the Spirit conforms us perfectly to the regeneration of humanity realised in Christ.

All of this suggests that it is right to see an ongoing, future-oriented dimension to Calvin's thought and in understanding 'substitution' and all parts of our salvation being wrought in Christ as the primary rather than the final or

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38 *Calvin's Commentaries*, '1 Thessalonians', p.340 (1:10)

39 Institutes I.xv.5

40 See e.g. Institutes III.xxv.8

41 Heinrich Quistorp points out that Calvin "is able to say much about the heavenly glory which is promised to Christians but only little about the new earth over which they are to reign with their Lord", *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, trans. Harold Knight (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1955), p.181. However it would not be fair to Calvin to assert more strongly that he lacks any sense of the redemption of the cosmos or that what sense he has of it suggests a complete discontinuity with the original creation ; "the elements of the world... are to be consumed, only that they may be renovated, their substance still remaining the same", *Catholic Epistles*, p.421 (2 Pet 3:10).

42 Institutes III.iii.9

43 Institutes II.ix.3

exclusive elements within Calvin's theology. Justification and sanctification both stem from Jesus Christ on this account, our justification resting in the humanity of Christ and the reconciliation of our humanity in Him with God, while our sanctification is also at all points dependent on our relationship with God established in Jesus Christ. There is no room here for understanding our sanctification or process of renewal apart from Christ (in work and person) because it is only as related to Christ (through the Spirit) that we are enabled to realise our reconciliation with God and to begin to grasp progressively the new creation we are in Christ. We can explore fruitfully some of the tensions which arise because of Calvin's dual emphasis on what has already been achieved and what remains to be consummated soteriologically by considering the process of renewal.

4.3 Sanctification

The process of renewal is one involving "mortification of the flesh and vivification of the spirit"[44], the two aspects of repentance for Calvin. Both of these aspects of repentance "happen to us by participation in Christ"[45] and we share in Christ's new life just as we share in his death, the death of our "old man". Calvin is not saying here that only by our repentance do we come by the fruits of Christ's salvific work because the very mortification of our old nature depends upon our being "violently slain by the sword of the Spirit and brought to nought".[46] But while Calvin is careful to found our repentance on God's and in particular on the Spirit's initiative[47], he does seem to find a part for us to play in repentance, in struggling against that "smouldering cinder of evil" which remains in us and which constantly seeks to allure us and spur us to commit sin. This smouldering cinder helps us to learn better of our own weakness according to Calvin[48] but while its presence indicates that sin still dwells in the regenerate, yet it has ceased to reign in them; thus sin remains "not to rule over them, but to humble them by the consciousness of their own weakness".[49]

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[44] Institutes III.iii.8

[45] Institutes III.iii.9

[46] Institutes III.iii.8 For Calvin the beginning of repentance is a turning to God that "arises from a pure and earnest fear of him" (III.iii.5), but this very fear is due to the Spirit's work for "wherever the fear of God flourishes, the Spirit has worked toward the salvation of man" (III.iii.21).

[47] Calvin describes the Spirit as urging us to repentance for example, Institutes III.iii.16

[48] Institutes III.iii.10

[49] Institutes III.iii.11

One might wonder whether this repentance is part of the process of participation in Christ. It does seem to be a participation in the salvation wrought by Christ because Calvin interprets "repentance as regeneration, whose sole end is to restore in us the image of God that had been disfigured and all but obliterated through Adam's transgression"[50]. On the other hand it is not a participation in the salvation wrought by Christ in the sense that it does not influence those who are regenerate to be so regenerated. However Calvin does write at times as if we do have it within ourselves and our actions to fall away from our ongoing regeneration (an idea we found earlier in Hebrews). While encumbered by our fleshly bodies we are it seems always susceptible to backsliding and perseverance is essential if we are to come into that inheritance which has been forged out for us in Christ. Calvin makes a particularly notable remark in relation to this point in his commentary on Heb. 3:14:

> He (Paul) praises them for having begun well. But in case they indulge themselves with the indifference of the flesh on the pretext of the grace which they have obtained, he says that there is need for perseverance. Most people only taste the Gospel... and do not think to progress .. they turn their course in another direction... Christ has given Himself to us to enjoy on this condition, that we preserve to the moment of death this great blessing by the same faith by which we were brought to partake of Him.[51]

From comments such as these it seems clear that we are able to participate in Christ insofar as we persevere in the faith we have graciously received, insofar as we remember in all humility how utterly dependent on God for our salvation we are, insofar as we acknowledge our own sinfulness and God's just wrath and bountiful mercy in our lifelong repentance. Our participation is always to be understood as a response, a response to the free and gracious initiative of God towards us, and even our response is founded on the work of God in us and reflects to His greater glory rather than giving us any cause for credit.[52]

But our participation in Christ also has a 'horizontal' dimension to it for Calvin. According to Calvin scripture teaches us that "all the gifts we possess have been bestowed by God and entrusted to us on condition that they be distributed

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50 Institutes III.iii.9

51 *Calvin's commentaries, Hebrews I Peter, II Peter* , ibid., p.42 The emphasis on our perseverance makes Calvin's remarks on our own assurance of salvation through faith ring rather hollow, and this emphasis is somewhat ironic in view of his criticism of the Council of Trent's doctrine of faith, that it denied that anyone could be assured of salvation while he lived.

52 Calvin is always alert to the sin of self-congratulation and pride; see for example Institutes III.vii.4

for our neighbours' benefit (cf. 1 Peter 4:10)".[53] And we cannot dismiss our responsibility for our neighbour on the grounds that s/he is not worthy of our service for "the image of God, which recommends him to you, is worthy of your giving yourself and all your possessions".[54] As we act in this way we 'exercise' the image of God within us in the sense that we follow God's pattern of extending His grace to the world as we reach out to our neighbours. And through this action we come more to realise that which has been wrought in us as we become what we are in Christ. In relation to this though conceiving of action in a downward direction T.F.Torrance writes that:

> the expression *come down* has, for Calvin, particular importance, for it means that a true knowledge of man is not only reflexive of the divine self-revelation but also of the divine action in grace. There is no true knowledge of man, therefore, unless it is conceived as grounded upon the downward motion of grace.[55]

This being the case we can see how Calvin links the 'horizontal' and 'vertical' dimensions of participation in God in a way which avoids both ethical indifference and Pelagianism. As Cooper points out, Calvin's "perception of the image of God as participation in the downward action of grace, combined with his emphasis on mankind as image, opens up the neighbour as an appropriate and necessary recipient of reverence for Christ".[56] But while participation is conceived here as activity which mirrors the divine activity Calvin asserts that there is a 'natural' (i.e. created) character to the image of God so that this image is not crystallised purely as or out of a dynamic ecstasis towards others (e.g. *Institutes* I.xv.3).

4.4 The Ecclesial Community

God has not left us without the necessary support and encouragement to foster our participation in Christ says Calvin and since "in our ignorance and sloth... we need outward helps to beget and increase faith within us, and advance to its goal, God has also added these aids that he may provide for our weakness".[57]

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53 Institutes III.vii.5

54 Institutes III.vii.6.

55 T.F.Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949)p.14

56 D.J.C.Cooper 'The Theology of Image in Eastern Orthodoxy and John Calvin', *SJT* vol.35 (1982), p.237.

57 Institutes IV.i.1

The aids God grants us are given us within the treasure of the church, where the gospel rightly preached and the sacraments duly administered enable us to be taught God's will and prescribe "a way for us, though still far off, to draw near to him".[58] Given this ecclesiological emphasis in Calvin's thought and the way in which the church provides a context for our participation in Christ and our renewal (as can be seen in Calvin's treatment of the prophetic, kingly and priestly roles of Christ), it is worth exploring his doctrine of the church further.

The "contradiction" between the fallen condition of humanity and God's intention for creation is resolved by Calvin only by God's salvation of the church:

> the prophet concludes that the whole order of nature would be subverted, unless God preserved the church. For the creation of the world would serve no purpose if there were no people to call upon God.[59]

Calvin speaks of Abraham as the "father of the church", because it is with Abraham that God made his covenantal promises and by which the people of Israel were separated as a peculiar people, a church. Participation in the covenant is not to be taken for granted however because while God is always true to *His* covenantal promises, human beings may break themselves off from the covenant, the covenant being a gift which comes with certain obligations and demands. Calvin details how the people of Israel as a body finally forfeit the covenantal protection of God, but how also God in his faithfulness to the covenant preserves a remnant, a remnant whose constitution involves a second, secret election of God;

> there was a twofold election of God; since speaking generally he chose the whole family of Abraham... But the other was secret, because God took to himself out of that multitude those whom he wished: and these are the sons of promise, these are the remnants of gratuitous favour.[60]

Both the "general" first election and the "particular" following election promise salvation but as Milner points out the "particular" election can be distinguished from the "general" election on three counts; "first, it has to do with individuals, rather than groups or nations; second, it is not only offered, but assigned; and third, it carries with it a certainty which does not admit of doubt".[61]

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58 Institutes I.i.1

59 *Comm. Ps.* 115.17

60 *Comm. Eze.* 16.3

61 B.C.Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), p.54

We become aware of our own election in and through the general election by realising the covenantal promises for ourselves; in other words it is by faith that our election is known because "we shall have a right definition of faith if we say that it is a firm and certain knowledge of the divine benevolence toward us, which, founded on the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ, is revealed in our minds and sealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit".[62] This way of realising our election suggests that we can have no assurance of another's salvation. Further, the only way in which we might gauge the true and not merely temporary character of our own faith is by perseverance, so that election must be "proved" throughout the "whole course of life" and is only finally confirmed upon our deaths[63] .

The second, secret election which Calvin adheres to leads him to speak of invisible and visible churches. The invisible church are the secretly elect, those "who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit".[64] On the other hand the visible church is the church as we see it, a church in which there are "mingled many hypocrites who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance".[65] While this "particular" election might at first sight suggest an individualistic approach, we should note that this election is an "engrafting" on to the Body of Christ, an action on the individual but one which acts by placing the individual in a particular context and set of relationships;

> it is not sufficient, indeed, for us to comprehend in mind and thought the multitude of the elect, unless we consider the *unity* of the church as that into which we are convinced we have been truly engrafted. For no hope of future inheritance remains to us unless we have been *united with all other members* under Christ, our Head.[66]

Elsewhere Calvin states that we cannot be Christians without being "brothers" and our very incorporation into Christ through the Spirit places us in a fellowship of love with fellow members; thus "God shows himself as present,

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[62] Institutes III.ii.7

[63] This is not to say that from God's perspective He is undecided about our election, but rather that "the elect will persevere, but only those who persevere know - only in their persevering - that they are of the elect". Milner, ibid., p.65

[64] Institutes IV.i.7

[65] Institutes IV.i.7

[66] Institutes IV.i.2

when by his Spirit he forms our hearts so that they entertain brotherly love... ; then by love we prove that we have God abiding in us".[67] Indeed such is the unity of the body that Calvin can suggest that "what has befallen the church ought to affect us in the same manner as if it had befallen each of us individually"[68] and that

> no increase is advantageous which does not bear a just proportion to the whole body. That man is mistaken who desires his own separate growth.[69]

There is little room here for individualism, and Calvin understands our election as one involving our participation in the church as the Body of Christ, a participation entailing particularly love and intercession for fellow members.[70] We do not wish to collapse the distinction between election and participation in the Body of Christ here, but we do wish to stress that the election of the individual has as its confirmation, concrete manifestation and implication, participation in the Body of Christ. Calvin can even speak occasionally of such participation being the means of preserving our election for "so powerful is participation in the church that it keeps us in the society of God".[71]

Our being engrafted into the Body of Christ has a dialectical quality about it for Calvin. While on the one hand our regeneration through Christ into which we enter through the Spirit is something achieved for us completely, once and for all, yet "we are daily gathered by the gospel into the fold of Christ".[72] Faith is in need of repeated refreshment and nurture and this is granted as we belong to and are united in the Body of Christ, in which we are regenerated. Calvin's dialectic extends here to seeing the church as being in one sense sinless and in another yet sinful:

> They sin not who remain in Christ ... Christ by his Spirit does not perfectly renew us in a day or a moment... It cannot then be but that the faithful are exposed to sin as long as they live in the world; but as far as the kingdom of Christ prevails in them, sin is abolished.[73]

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[67] *Comm. 1 John* 4.12

[68] *Comm. Is.* 22.4

[69] *Comm. Eph.* 4.16

[70] See Milner, ibid., pp.185-187 for the importance of *sumpatheia* and mutual intercession in Calvin's ecclesiology.

[71] Institutes IV.i.3

[72] *Comm. John* 11.51

[73] *Comm. I John* 3.5

Again we see here the tension between the salvation brought by Christ and our participation in Christ, the tension between the 'now' and the 'not yet'. Whether this tension is in fact a plain contradiction remains to be seen but there is the possibility of understanding this dialectic as follows; we are to grasp the fact that we have been saved and regenerated and so participate in this actuality by our way of being, a participation which will bring home to us the reality of that salvation wrought in Christ and an appreciation of God's initiating, directing and completing of our regeneration in Christ through the Spirit.

The church is the scene of our regeneration and the ongoing context of humanity's restoration for "the restoration of the church shall be of such a nature as to be perpetual".[74] Just as the restoration of the image of God within us is not in all ways already effected but involves a gradual renovation over time, so too the church "is not so much an institution in history in which the restoration of order has been accomplished, as it is itself the history of that restoration".[75] This history of restoration proceeds concretely by the preaching and hearing of the Gospel primarily for "God breathes faith into us only by the instrument of his gospel, as Paul points out that "faith comes from hearing" (Rom. 10:17)".[76] The second mark of the church and instrument by which we are drawn more closely to God is the sacraments; indeed "wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists".[77] Calvin is clear however about the priority of the Gospel:

> ..assurance of salvation does not depend upon participation in the sacrament, as if justification consisted in it. For we know that justification is lodged in Christ alone, and that it is communicated to us no less by the preaching of the gospel than by the seal of the sacrament, and without the latter can stand unimpaired.[78]

Calvin's view of the importance of the sacraments is not without relevance to the discussion of participation because Calvin is keen to reject the view that

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[74] *Comm. Is.* 66.72

[75] Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the church,* ibid., p.47

[76] Institutes IV.i.5; God "also provides for our weakness in that he prefers to address us in human fashion through interpreters in order to draw us to himself, rather than to thunder at us and drive us away", ibid.

[77] Institutes IV.i.9

[78] Institutes IV.xiv.14

participation in Christ is an automatic benefit of sacramental practices. Calvin felt that the Roman Church tied grace to the sacraments in a way which denied the sovereign freedom of the Spirit of God whereas "the sacraments properly fulfil their office only when the Spirit, that inward teacher, comes to them, by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved".[79] Similarly McDonnell can write of Calvin's Eucharistic Lord that he "is the sovereign Lord, the uncommitted who is never so committed as to lose the freedom of his lordship".[80] This might suggest that Calvin denies a "real" presence of Christ to the consecrated bread and wine, but such a remark needs qualification. For Calvin the focus of his Eucharistic reflections tends not to be so much how objectively bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ but rather how that body and blood become, in the Supper, ours. Crucially Calvin maintains that "we maintain no other presence than that of a relationship".[81] For Calvin the body of Christ remains at the right hand of the Father in heaven, interceding for us, underlining humanity's forgiveness and acceptability in Christ to God. Yet we do participate in this very body in the Eucharist because the Spirit lifts us to heaven to participate in Christ.[82]

But what use is the participation in Christ through the Spirit in the Eucharist, if we are able by faith apart from the sacraments to be joined with Christ? Calvin suggests a number of different purposes which the Eucharist serves; by it we are not united to Christ (faith does that) but it is "to seal and confirm that promise by which he (Christ) testifies that his flesh is food indeed and his blood is drink (Jn. 6:56), which feed us unto eternal life (Jn. 6:55)".[83] Thus the Eucharist has the role of assuring the faithful of Christ's promises.[84] By the Eucharist we are "nourished unto eternal life", sustained and "refreshed", and Calvin assigns to the particular ministry of the sacraments generally the "confirmation and

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79 Institutes IV.xiv.9

80 J.McDonnell, *John Calvin, the church, and the Eucharist* (Princeton: Princeton Uni. Press, 1967), p.363

81 Institutes IV.xvii.13

82 See Calvin's *A short Treatise on the Lord's Supper* (1541), in *Calvin's Tracts and Treatises* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), vol. 2, p.280.

83 Institutes IV.xvii.4

84 As T.H.L.Parker paraphrases it, it is not that the Word of God's promise is weak. "What is weak is our faith in the promise. The sacraments are intended to establish our weak faith in the firm and faithful promise of God". See his *Calvin. An Introduction to His Thought* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), p.148

increase of faith".[85] Most significantly Calvin suggests that in the Eucharist ;

..we are quickened by the true partaking of him; and he has therefore designated this partaking by the words "eating" and "drinking", in order that no one should think that the life that we receive from him is received by mere knowledge. As it is not the seeing but the eating of bread that suffices to feed the body, so the soul must truly and deeply become partaker of Christ that it may be quickened to spiritual life by his power... this eating is the result and effect of faith....For even though the apostle teaches that "Christ dwells in our hearts through faith" (Eph. 3:17,), no one will interpret this indwelling to be faith, but all feel that he is there expressing a remarkable effect of faith, for through this believers gain Christ abiding in them.[86]

This passage is of significance because it suggests that in the Eucharist we come by a mode of participation in Christ, an "indwelling" of Christ, which is distinct from that union of Christ which occurs in faith, although this "indwelling" follows on from and is an effect of faith. While assurance of salvation and justification do not rest upon participation in the sacrament, such participation brings with it benefits to our faith and a distinctive sense of our unity with Christ such that "by true partaking of him, his life passes into us and is made ours - just as bread when taken as food imparts vigour to the body".[87] It is almost as if the embodying of our faith in the Lord's Supper brings with it a quality of communion with God in Christ otherwise absent.

We noted above how Calvin points out that the faithful are to open the bosom of their hearts to embrace the Eucharistic Lord, a comment suggesting believers have an active part to play in participation in Christ and the renewal of the image of God. Other comments Calvin makes suggest this too; for example Calvin notes as we have seen that our persistence in the faith is required if we are to reach that full measure of union with Christ which is realised at death, just as repentance, humility and service of our neighbour also effect our progress towards our heavenly perfection. And yet Calvin is also adamant that there can be no human "additions" to God's salvific grace, that God's grace is "efficacious of itself"[88], that our perseverance is *exclusively* God's work[89] , that all that happens does so according to God's predetermined plan.[90] Again we see these

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[85] Institutes IV.xiv.9
[86] Institutes IV.xvii.5
[87] Institutes IV.xvii.5
[88] Institutes II.iii.10
[89] Institutes II.iii.11
[90] E.g. Institutes I.xvi.4

two strands of Calvin's thought in tension, and it is this area of Calvin's thought where we find the greatest strains between Christ's salvation of humanity and our participation in that salvation. The issue of freedom in Calvin's theology provides a useful focus in discussing these strains and it is to this issue that we will now turn our attention.

4.5 Divine and Human Freedom

Calvin, like (certainly the older) Augustine before him, suggests that the human will is such that, apart from grace, it cannot help but will ill. Calvin draws an interesting distinction here between necessity and compulsion[91], Calvin suggesting that we sin necessarily but not compulsively. By this Calvin seems to mean that human beings sin necessarily in that our freedom cannot of itself be exercised in such a way that we embrace the good with any consistency or constancy, our will cannot help but exercise itself in a negative way; but there is no compulsion to our sinning in the sense of it involving the sort of external coercion which would imply a lack of responsibility for our sins on our part. Such an awareness of our inability to help ourselves leads Calvin to attack those such as Pelagius who "lodged the first cause of salvation in man's merit".[92] We should rather follow Paul, says Calvin, for in his writings "we see how, not simply content to have given God due praise for our salvation, he expressly excludes us from all participation in it. It is as if he were saying that not a whit remains to man to glory in, for the whole of salvation comes from God".[93] Thus it is God who arouses love and zeal for righteousness within us by "bending, forming, and directing, our hearts to righteousness. He completes his work, moreover, by confirming us to perseverance".[94] But although our freedom to will the good is founded, directed, sustained and actualised by God, Calvin does seem to speak of a certain contribution to this process on our part;

> (for if it is said) that after we have by the Lord's power once for all been brought to obey righteousness, we go forward by our own power and are inclined to follow the action of grace, I do not gainsay it. For it is very certain that where God's grace reigns, there is readiness to obey it.[95]

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91 Institutes II.iii.6
92 Institutes II.iii.7
93 Institutes II.iii.6
94 Institutes II.iii.6
95 Institutes II.iii.11

But even this is qualified by Calvin in that such an inclination on our part is founded and nourished by the Spirit. The importance of this is that for Calvin there is no sense here of our independent contribution to the work of salvation, no ability of ours isolated from God which God needs to cooperate with in order to effect his purposes for us, nothing within us which can realise the good *apart* from God and relationship to Him. If Calvin leaves room for our cooperation with God, it is with God that the priority lies and it is a cooperation in which we can be involved only by God's initiative and sustaining graciousness. One reason why this is so is that Calvin will not allow any infringement of God's sovereignty and control of creation. A guiding axiom for Calvin is that people "are not so free to choose that God's will does not rule over their freedom".[96] Unfortunately Calvin draws from this in places a conclusion which is potentially somewhat at odds with the suggestion above that there is space for a human contribution to salvation in Calvin's thought. In stressing God's power and freedom over creation Calvin writes that people "are so in his power that he causes them to be inclined where and when he will, either to bestow benefits, or to inflict punishments - indeed by his most secret but most righteous judgment".[97] This is the sort of statement which leads to the criticism that we have a 'puppeteer' God here, a structure of thought which implies God's direct responsibility for evil, and which might promote ethical laxity and fatalism. These are of course familiar and well-rehearsed criticisms of Calvin's theology.

In the end Calvin does not resolve the seemingly contradictory assertions he gives when speaking of human freedom and its place in our participation in the salvation wrought in Christ. While at times it appears that we are at least capable of placing ourselves outside salvation by lacking persistence, humility and/or due regard for our neighbour, at other times it appears that even such decisions and actions as these are primarily and positively decreed by our sovereign God. We should perhaps not be surprised at finding such a dialectic in Calvin's thought, it is but one of many. Partee notes for example how Calvin vacillated between the supralapsarians and the infralapsarians writing that "Calvin taught that sin was positively decreed (with the supralapsarians) when he was dealing with the doctrine of God; and permissively decreed (with the infralapsarians) when he was dealing with the doctrine of man".[98] The former

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96 Institutes II.iv.7

97 Institutes II.iv.7

98 C.Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill,1977), p.143

implied that God was the author of sin, which Calvin denied, while the latter denied God's sovereignty if stress was laid on *permission* (or it led back to the supralapsarian position if stress was laid on the permissive *decree*). Wendel gives a list of "dialectical opposites" he sees Calvin affirming, a list including God's wrath/love, humanity's complete justification/ incomplete regeneration, gratitude/contempt for earthly goods, God's omnipotence/ human responsibility. Wendel concludes that "it would be better, we think, to confess that Calvin's is not a closed system elaborated round a central idea, but that it draws together, one after another, a whole series of Biblical ideas, some of which can only with difficulty be reconciled...".[99] There seems little doubt in the light of such dialectics as these that Calvin's thought is not so much 'systematic' as it is primarily scriptural and confessional, and it involves affirmations of what Calvin takes to be the scriptural witness to revelation, affirmations which Calvin will not compromise for the sake of all-too-human, reasonable canons of consistency and coherency.

4.6 Binding the Person and Work of Christ

Scholars such as Hart and J.B.Torrance have pointed out the seriousness with which Calvin treats the notion of participation against those who would turn Calvin into a Calvinist[100], but they offer no suggestions as to how we might move beyond the dialectical impasse created thereby (and which we mentioned above). The key lies perhaps with the humanity of Christ, a focus for participation which may combine the emphases of substitution and response-ability. In terms of substitution we can understand the Incarnation in terms of the Word's ontological transformation of humanness. By becoming incarnate and living a life of obedience to the will of the Father the Son perfects humanity, particularly in terms of right relatedness to the Father, other creatures and the creation. The universal significance of Christ here lies in the way in which our humanity is now *related to* God in and through Christ. Such a relation is of ontological significance in making humanity a new creation, a new creation 'hidden in Christ'. To say it is of ontological significance assumes as we have

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99 F.Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought* (London: William Collins Sons,1963).

100 Followers of Calvin such as Beza elevated the concept of the double decree and predestination in Calvin, an elevation leaving precious little room to make sense of Calvin's notion of participation.

previously made clear that what we are is defined to some extent by who we are in relation to and what manner of relationship is involved. As God's creatures we have always been related to the Creator but the manner of that relationship is transformed by Christ's incarnation among us. This is not the transformation of God's anger into love however, as if it was God who needed reconciling to the world rather than vice versa. God's constancy to His covenant undergirds and informs the transformation of our relationship with God, a relationship liberating us *from* guilt, being-for-ourselves and death, liberating us *for* God and our neighbours. While atonement focuses on the transformation of the divine-human relationship in Christ however, participation focuses on the way of our relationship with God through Christ as grounded in this transformation and in particular on human beings' relationship to the humanity of Christ, a humanity which proleptically reveals the perfection, fulfilment and beauty of God and ourselves in God. With the life, death and resurrection of Christ humanity is ontologically changed, reconciled, reunited and now stands related to its potential destiny, meaning and hope, in Christ. This new creation is revealed to us as we live it out in worship and in the life of communities of mutual respect, love and service, when what we are in Christ is truly affirmed by the way we are in the world. This could be understood as our participation in God, as we become what we will be finally through the Holy Spirit.

But does this approach, focusing on the transformation of our human-ness, not disregard the importance of Christ's life as a life of obedience, obedience even unto death, death on a cross (Phil. 2:8)? We can speak of the "steady working out" of the hypostatic union or the incarnation in the life, death and resurrection of Christ but this in itself pays only lip-service to the cross which has abiding and central significance in the gospel narratives. The remarks of many of the Church Fathers seem to show this disregard; Athanasius stated that "The Logos became man so that we might become divinized" (*De Inc.* 54); Leo I said that "He became a man of our race so that we might become sharers of the divine nature"; Augustine wrote that Christ "descended that we might ascend, and remaining in his nature was made a partaker of our nature, that we remaining in our nature might be made partakers of his nature". The logic of Christ participating in our humanity enabling us to participate in his nature is not immediately clear. Nor is it obvious that the cross finds a place in such logic but

an understanding of some sort of admirabile commercium is rooted in the New Testament and it is there that the significance of Christ's work also becomes apparent. For example Christ becomes "sin" (2 Cor. 5:21), a "curse" (Gal. 3:13), poor for our sake (2 Cor. 8:9), that we might share in God's covenant righteousness, receive the blessing of Abraham and become rich through His poverty. Christ's action is *deliberate* (e.g. Rom. 8:32, Jn. 10:17), by it we are *liberated* (e.g. Rom. 7, Jn. 8:44, 1 Thess. 1:10), *drawn into intimate relation with God* (e.g. Eph. 1:5ff, 1 Cor. 12, Rom. 8:10ff) and all this is *due to God's love* (e.g. Jn. 3:16, Rom. 8:32-39).[101] From this strand of scripture we might infer that it is not simply the fact of Incarnation that provides for our access to the Godhead but also the way of that Incarnation, Christ's life, death and resurrection. In particular the weight of scripture is on the passion and cross of Christ, so that if we wish to understand the logic of the admirabile commercium we must attend to the atonement. Space does not permit a detailed exposition of atonement theory here but what is important is to bring out the way in which, following scripture and Calvin's[102] cue, we must bring the person and work of Christ together in our understanding of participation and earth participation in Christ's atoning obedience. Such obedience unto death effected the new creation we are in Christ, a new creation we are called to participate in progressively by our way of being.

Briefly then, by faith we understand Jesus' death in part as a vicarious acknowledgement of God's righteous judgment on human sin, enabling us to participate in that acknowledgement. The cross is that place where appropriate human repentance can be accomplished in union with Christ because here is crystallised our rejection of God, God's judgement on sin *and* God's transcending loving forgiveness. Human beings by faith see the cross as the fruits of their covenant-breaking, the judgment of God on their waywardness and yet as the ultimate expression of God's love for them, the love of a God who calls them back from destruction by taking their destruction on Himself as a means both of affirming His righteousness and as a means of drawing human

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101 For a more detailed consideration see Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theodrama*, Vol. IV, pp. 240ff

102 T.H.L.Parker for example notes that "it is quite clear that for Calvin salvation is won by 'the whole course of obedience', with the Cross as the culmination, as the supreme test of his obedience". See his *Calvin*, p.72

beings to Himself (in the Son).[103] Our acknowledgement of all this cannot be simply an epistemological acknowledgement, as if repentance and faith were merely intellectual acts of assent. (Calvin stressed that faith is the response of the whole person, cf. *Institutes* III.2.8f). Rather this acknowledgement must involve our entire being and its relationships to God and other human beings. Such an acknowledgement is marked by joy and freedom for the forgiveness given, a sense of the value of human life in the sight of God, a realisation of the holiness and righteousness of God, a grasp of the tremendous unity and ecstatic love that binds the persons of the Trinity, humility and the urge to reparation, to realising our fulfilment in Christ.

Jesus' crucifixion provides the hope that the response of the human covenant-partner to God is not necessarily and always flawed. This does not mean that we as human beings, now having been transformed by Christ's life and Incarnation are perfectly able to keep the covenant. (That much is empirically vouchsafed!) Neither does it mean that simply as we imitate Christ we will fulfil the covenant. Rather it suggests that we may realise our fulfilment as covenant-partners in Christ, through the timely and perfecting operation of the Spirit. While such a fulfilment remains to be actualised fully eschatologically, yet we are able now (proleptically and through the Spirit) as we acknowledge that only *in* Christ are we forgiven and reconciled, to live lives which reflect Christ's mode of loving, a mode of loving in which the human fulfils the covenant. We continue to slip back from this mode of loving and as we do we must return to the place of the cross, to realise once again our forgiveness and the context in which it is forged. True acknowledgement of our reconciliation is not to be separated here from compassionate responsibility to our neighbour. It is not that loving our neighbour is a condition for reconciliation, but that without such compassion we have shown ourselves that we have not grasped the implications of the cross in terms of the love of God for each human being, including ourselves. The model of *participation* in Christ is helpful here because it retains a sense of our dependence on the reconciling, forgiving, love-inspiring Christ while also leaving room for a sense of our separateness in

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[103] We would distance ourselves here from any unbiblical notion of substituted punishment. Such a view fails to appreciate that the atonement occurs within the context of the loving relationships of God towards the world and between Father and Son. The Son vicariously repents on our behalf, according a perfect human Amen to the judgment of God on human sin, but this is realised within a deeper 'collaboration' of Father and Son seeking to reconcile the world to God.

relatedness to this Christ. Further, it invites an understanding of discipleship as an ongoing collaboration continuously initiated and in-formed by Christ (through the Spirit). To separate participation from the work of Christ and in particular the cross is to invite for example sloth (if we glibly assume a kind of 'cheap grace'), despair (because of our continued sinfulness) or pride (as we congratulate ourselves on our adherence to the *imitatio Christi*). Hubris is undermined as we understand our service of God and one another as a being taken up into the movement of Christ towards the Father and our neighbour (a movement realised in the Spirit), a movement grounded in Christ's liberating work. Despair is alleviated as we continually return to the source of our forgiveness and hope at the foot of the cross. Sloth is challenged as we appreciate that the one who brings new life to us is simultaneously the one who brings our neighbours in need to us.

4.7 Freedom in the Spirit

Returning to our discussion of the new creation we are in Christ, as Calvin was only too aware, our behaviour is often somewhat at odds with this new creation, and this requires some explanation. Following Calvin we should perhaps begin not with the priority of human 'freedom' but with God in explaining such behaviour. Perhaps such behaviour can be seen as indicating something of the personal and spatio-temporal room we are afforded by the *person* of the Holy Spirit, space which is vital if our otherness is to be affirmed. However it is not enough simply to affirm our otherness as the freedom (of choice) of embracing our salvation, because this would simply stress our otherness at the expense of our relatedness to God. God binds Himself to us, relates Himself to us, whether we like it or not. The space afforded our otherness does not necessarily and primarily imply a freedom finally to accept or reject God but rather involves a freedom concerning the timing and particular manner in which that relationship comes to be perfected eschatologically. And this is a freedom both of the human being and of the Spirit. In this way the freedom of the Spirit is affirmed and when the truly personal nature of the Spirit is understood a conception of human freedom as *a being set free for the Father by relationship with the Spirit through Christ* can be affirmed.

What might our freedom look like within this framework? There appear to be two immediate possibilities. The first would be to accept Calvin's primary notion of human freedom, an account which suggests we cannot but err in isolation from God's influence. One philosophy of freedom that would undergird such a position is compatibilism, which suggests that causal determinism and human freedom are somehow compatible.[104] *If* this were so, then God's predetermined plan need not conflict with our responsibility before God. What might this freedom look like then? Fergusson suggests that here it might be that

> ..a voluntary action is one which is explained by factors which are internal to the agent's constitution. In this way, it is entirely accounted for by the sum total of dispositions internal to an agent prior to the moment of each mental and physical act. The notion that there is some extra ingredient called 'freedom of the will', which enables the agent to retain the possibility of choosing otherwise, is deemed irrelevant and illusory. Such an account of the will would not render action free but only random and indeterminate.[105]

On this account "the concept of 'freedom' is usually reserved to describe the quality of life in which the Holy Spirit enables the believer to will what is truly good".[106] We are set free for God by the Holy Spirit who provides the will and desire, and who actually effects this liberation. The trouble with this view of freedom is that it sits uneasily with our own experience of feeling able to choose freely, and external coercion has been replaced by internal determinism in such a way as to invalidate the authenticity of such experience. It also leaves the problem of who is responsible for evil actions; if the Spirit does not provide the necessary conditions for a human being's doing the good, then is the Spirit not ultimately responsible for the evil actions that otherwise result? Finally there is the question of how far our otherness is truly affirmed under this model of human freedom. If our freedom takes shape within the relationship to the personal other which is the Holy Spirit then simultaneous with that relatedness is a separatedness which is in danger of being lost with the compatibilist account of freedom. It is however a big step from this statement to the assumption that separatedness must imply ultimate freedom of choice; what is called for is an account of human separateness and freedom in relation to God which does not deny the sovereign freedom of God to save His creatures as He

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104 A recent attempt to defend this position has been put forward by P.Helm, see his *The Providence of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1993)

105 D.Fergusson, 'Predestination: A Scottish Perspective', in *SJT*, vol.46, No. 4 (1993), p.475

106 Ibid., p.475

wills but which neither collapses nor (potentially) severs the Creator-creature relationship by its account of human freedom.

A second possibility would be to say that Calvin is wrong to assume axiomatically that God's freedom is always and essentially in precedence over human freedom. Such an axiom already implies a certain compulsion to God's freedom. God is not free, under Calvin's scheme, to elevate human freedom, to allow Himself to be pushed around by human beings as it were, which it could be argued is in a sense, precisely what does happen in the story of the cross. McDonnell, speaking particularly in respect of the sacraments, is right to point out that "God is not bound; what is more, God cannot bind himself! Calvin will not permit it!"[107] So the second possibility would be to suggest that God allows our freedom some space, that God leaves us the freedom to reject Him, that God effects a salvation for us which depends on our free acceptance of it, a position which provides at least for the possibility of (eventually) universal salvation and which entails moral responsibility. In this way we are set free for God, but it remains for us to embrace this freedom.

There are of course different nuances that can be put on these two positions. Looking at the second and our preferred possibility for example, we need not regard our freedom to embrace or shun God's offer as implying the innate ability to hear God's Word or an ability to appropriate God independent of God's will. We can take from Calvin the idea that the Holy Spirit creates the conditions for a genuine decision before Christ so that it is only as God relates to us that we are enabled to embrace God's call. The sort of freedom advocated by this possibility would involve a libertarian account of choice;

> (this kind of freedom) can be approached negatively by arguing that an action is a free action if it has no complete explanation in terms of the agent's personality, brain-state or genetic make-up. It is a free action only if we can say that even in the presence of these conditioning factors the agent could have acted otherwise.[108]

Such an approach must beware of lapsing into the kind of synergism which would "lose sight of the preeminence of grace and the divine over-ruling of

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[107] McDonnell, *John Calvin, the church, and the Eucharist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p.370

[108] Fergusson, 'Predestination', p.477

human affairs".[109] We can avoid such dangers however and build on Irving's suggestive thought. By understanding the divine over-ruling of human affairs in terms of an assurance of our perfecting in Christ eschatologically through the Spirit we can retain a sense of the Creator's oversight of creation. By understanding the preeminence of grace as the particular and historical activity of the Holy Spirit who creates the conditions for our responsiveness without coercing it[110] we can retain a relational account of God's activity which is not primarily synergistic but dependent on God's initiative. Accounts of this relationship such as "I, yet not I but the grace of God" can be seen from this perspective not as debasing our humanity but as acknowledging the glory of the human being to rest in the dependent relation of creature to Creator.[111] (And here we might note that Calvin was right to guard against accounts of human goodness which neglected the major and primary role played by God in such goodness; his keenness to guard against human pride, arrogance and self-congratulation was a keenness to protect our freedom too, freedom which stood in danger of being fettered with the chains of hubris by false accounts of human response-ability.[112])

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[109] Ibid., p.478

[110] The immediate question arising here is what it means to say that "God creates the conditions for us to respond"? Perhaps we could understand the Spirit as drawing out of us an ec-static way of being in relation to others (i.e. the Father through Christ, and our neighbours), a way of being that we appear to have initiated but which we may realise is not simply of our own creation. Any account of such a development in terms of ascribing certain features of this development to the Spirit and certain features to the human being is flawed because (a) we cannot tie the sovereign Spirit only to specific functions and (b) it is precisely in the rich ambiguity of the Spirit's working and ours that God protects human freedom and (c) to separate Spirit and human being in such a functional way is potentially to dissolve a personal relationship into mechanical co-operation. By enabling changes in our modes of relationship the Spirit affects the "I" in terms of reforming patterns of responses, hierarchies of desires and so on. (But this account is not individualistic because it involves individuals in relation to others, divine and human.) The Spirit does not coerce because it is possible for former patterns of relating to be reverted to (although in the light of the experience of the Spirit it is never quite 'reversion'). This suggests that the work of the Spirit can be set at nought provisionally (and perhaps even finally), but this is because the Spirit so allows this possibility in acting in a personal; relational way. (It would still be possible to give an account here of universalism in that the Spirit might so continue to re-form patterns of relationality as to make for the inevitability of our 'right-relating' and perfection as children of God).

[111] Such a position resists the perennial temptation to dissolve the vertical into the horizontal and it retains (with Barth) an ethical seriousness which "takes both God as one who is actively engaged in personal relationship with his human creatures, and the human moral agent as one whose basic identity is given in that relationship". N.Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits: Karl Barth's Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), p.165

[112] Calvin rejects the criticisms of those who say he is hostile to good works, and he argues that his hostility is aimed rather at our reliance upon them, our glorying in them or our ascribing salvation to them, see *Institutes* III.xvii.1

4.8 Conclusion

Our study of Calvin has revealed that the notion of participation is an important one for him. While Calvin is keen to stress the completeness of our salvation in Christ, he understands participation as a sharing (in Christ's humanity), which is not primarily an imitatio Christi, not so much a sharing in Christ's way of being towards others as it is an obedient correspondence to that person whose humanity is our salvation and which provides our horizon of meaning and purpose. This 'obedient correspondence' can be seen as we participate in Christ's prophetic, kingly and priestly roles for example, not in prophesying, ruling or atoning of ourselves, but in following Christ as prophet, king and priest. Our humble, penitent and joyful response to the event of the cross is a central strand of this obedient correspondence, because it is there that we find our reconciliation to God effected and manifest. Further, participation is about our becoming (the new human beings who we are in Christ, through the Holy Spirit), which involves in part reflecting that downward action of grace we see in the Triune God in our service of those made in God's image, our neighbours.

Participation is **in** the humanity of Christ, in the sense that Christ's humanity enables our reconciliation to God and in relation to Christ's humanity (through the Spirit) we are enabled to become the human beings God intended us to be. This participation is not about an abstract association of our humanity with the Form of Christ's 'new' humanity, but is about being related to the person and work of Christ, understanding ourselves from and acting upon the events of Christ's life (paradigmatically the cross) which tell us who we have been, are and will be (hopefully) in Christ. Further, it seems that this participation in Christ's humanity *is* our participation in the life of the Triune God. **How** we participate is through the effects of faith, faith which is graciously given primarily in the Gospel. In the sacraments we find nourishment and reassurance for our faith, as well as realising in the Eucharist a special mode of participation in terms of the indwelling of Christ. Humility, repentance and service of our neighbour all express our participation in Christ's humanity and enhance the renovation of the image of God within us. **Where** we participate is particularly the church, that place where the gospel is properly preached and heard, where the sacraments are rightly administered, where we intercede and serve our

brethren and where true worship is rendered to God. **Who** it is that participates is however not for us to know precisely, we can only be assured of our own part in the salvation wrought by Christ. And finally **when** we participate is in a sense now, in that what we are we already are in Christ, but it is also in a sense a complete participation only beyond death, when all hindrances and stumbling-blocks to union with God in Christ are finally cast aside. The notion of participation sits somewhat uncomfortably with other elements of Calvin's theology and in particular the manner in which he expounds God's sovereign freedom and control of creation. This having been said, Calvin's thought is richly suggestive and we have seen in the latter part of this chapter how aspects of his theology can contribute to building up a view of participation which may retain God's oversight of creation and a sense of our responsiveness without lapsing either into pure determinism or synergism.

For Calvin the relationship between justification and sanctification is bonded in the work and person of Christ, so that at no point can our renovation be torn from its ontological roots in Christ and because our justification is also a calling to become what we are in Christ neither is there room for cheap grace. Participation in Christ is often associated with the process of sanctification, a progressive participation in God which we develop increasingly as we more and more obediently respond to Christ. This is a one-sided understanding whose danger is that of overstressing our role in the process of regeneration separated from justification, a danger which the colloquial use of 'participation' exacerbates, emphasising as it does the participant's active, even proactive, involvement. Calvin's wisdom in holding justification and sanctification more tightly together through Christ is helpful[113] because he gives us a clue here to a better view of participation which is not so much about degrees of sanctification apart from justification as it is about degrees of realisation of what we are to become in Christ, rooted in the primary realisation of what we are already in Christ. On this understanding our participation is initiated and sustained by our reconciliation with God in Christ, but this is a participation which we grasp

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[113] While Calvin holds these together, he reacts against Osiander's (supposed) confusion of justification and sanctification. Osiander took the noun 'righteousness' and the verb 'to justify' in the sense of being made righteous through the indwelling of the Divine essence, as well as in the sense of pardoning sin. The danger of such a confusion is that Christians are robbed of their assurance as traces of their sinfulness continue to emerge. Any good we do cannot ease this anxiety; "no portion of righteousness sets our consciences at peace until it has been determined that we are pleasing to God, because we are entirely righteous before him". Institutes III.xi.11.

intermittently and whose reality is properly responded to and glimpsed better as we conform to Christ; even so the reality will be manifest fully only eschatologically. As we conform progressively in obedience to Christ we realise the Pauline paradox 'I, yet not I, but the grace of God', recognising that our conforming to Christ is in fact primarily Christ conforming us to Himself and so we are referred back constantly to God's initiative (and paradigmatically to our justification), in the process of sanctification. Only with these qualifications can we speak of degrees of participation, which is not to do with grades of achievement but with a progressive realisation and embracing of God's beneficent mercy and intention for us, despite ourselves. In one sense our uplifting is complete in our justification in Christ, but it remains for us to embrace this uplifting in the personal, spatio-temporal space provided pneumatologically by God. Participation is about this embracing, grounded in the person and work of Christ, participation which does not undermine eschatology but which provides for a deeper yearning for the eschaton, when He will be all in all and finally address those stumbling-blocks and stubborn barriers we erect to keep ourselves apart from God and one another.

5. PARTICIPATION AND KNOWLEDGE

The question of how we know that we are participating in Christ is not one Calvin can answer other than by recourse to "the inner testimony of the Spirit" within the individual. Undergirding this position is Calvin's second 'secret', individualised election, that election through which God continues to bind himself to the covenant but not an election visibly identifiable with a specific group of the elect. Authentic faith realises the assurance of the Spirit, and does so individually, albeit within the context of the worshipping community in which, Calvin points out, the believer is to be embedded. Despite his stress on the corporate nature of the Christian life, in worship and in ethics, Calvin has here an epistemology which *might* be considered as individualistically conceived, so that claims to participate in Christ could be criticised as being nothing but personal opinion, an idiosyncratic bias - subjectivist (in the common meaning of that word). The only experience that can affirm an individual's participation is his own 'private' experience. The lack of clear criteria based on observation and empirical data means for one such as Hume that the idea of participation must be consigned to the flames (unless one was to regard participation as logically conceived, so that for example to be human is by definition to participate in God because human beings bear the (perhaps sullied) image of God).

Given the combined stress on relationship with God and relationships within community in the concept of participation, the notion might help us beyond an understanding of our *knowledge* of God and assurance as individualistically conceived. The notion lends itself to tying self-knowledge to knowledge of God because to participate in God is in some way to share in God, be affected, transformed or moved by God, and in appreciating this we realise self-knowledge as well as God-awareness.[1] The issue to be addressed is how we know that we participate in God - can we go further than Calvin's 'inner assurance' or not? And associated with this question is the wider issue of how we know we are dealing with God at all. (In addition, assuming what we know relates to who we are, and that we can at least argue that our way of being is shaped by and shapes what we perceive, how we understand our environment and being aware of the network of relationships in which we are set, then the

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[1] We have seen how Calvin and others stressed the relation of these two types of knowledge; see e.g. Institutes I.i.1-2 .

question of knowing of our participation in God relates to the question of how, if at all, we are ontologically affected by participation).

5.1 Aspects of Kant's Epistemology

To begin to answer this question it will be useful to survey some historical moments in the wider philosophical scene. Kant (1724-1804) held that our moral consciousness is not without significance, and that if moral evaluations are not meaningless then some degree of free-will has to be a reality. Further the moral agent "judges that he can do a certain thing because he is conscious that he ought, and he recognises that he is free, a fact which, but for the moral law, he would never have known" [2]. This means that some part of our being is free of the empirical world of matter in motion governed by scientific laws for Kant, because it must be possible for us to move some of the material objects in that world (such as our bodies) 'at will' *if* moral consciousness is trustworthy. Now while our motivations for action and the exercise of our freedom may be conditioned by passions, desires, and intuitions, Kant held that "what distinguished us in our capacity as moral beings was the ability to act in defiance of the promptings of 'sensuous' inclination and to be determined in what we did solely by principles which we ourselves prescribed"[3] . Indeed Kant believed that 'practical reason' was possible, that not only could reason constrain and justify the choice of means, but also the choice of ends upon which it depends. But this is only objective reason if the choice of ends of action is made irrespective of passions, interests and desires, and an action is objectively rational only as reason prompts me to act. If I am motivated by 'passions' then reason has not determined my goals, but if reason is to be practical, if reason is to motivate action, then it must issue in imperatives, determining what an agent does. Or, as Kant put it, "Reason, with its practical law, determines the will immediately"[4]. The ability to be motivated by reason alone Kant called the autonomy of the will, an autonomy he contrasts with the 'heteronomy' of the agent whose will is subject to external causes (i.e. causes founded on anything other than reason). Only the noble soul, able to overcome

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2 I.Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason and other Works on the theory of Ethics*, tr. T.K.Abbott (London: Longmans, Green, 1879), p.165

3 P.Gardiner, *Kierkegaard* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), p.20

4 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.156

the promptings of self-interest and desire for the sake of reason, is worthy of our respect for Kant, and only such a soul is truly free, being free from external influences in (rationally) determining his ends. This exclusive authority of reason takes practical shape in the form of categorical imperatives, imperatives which make real and unconditional demands and whose foundation lies in reason alone. The categorical imperative is independent of the empirical conditions and particularity of rational agents in that it could be adopted by any rational agent, whatever his circumstances. It can be formulated as 'act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law'.

In our moral consciousness we are aware then of certain promptings and by assessing whether these qualify as categorical imperatives we can ascertain the reasonable nature (or otherwise) of such motivations. Our moral consciousness also makes us aware of our duty to promote what Kant called the Summum Bonum, the 'highest good', and the associated obligation of pursuing our moral perfection as individuals. The former goal is not realistically realisable on our own, and yet it presented itself to us as something we were morally obliged to further. For Kant this suggested that its achievement must be regarded as attainable and this demanded the postulation of a supersensible agency capable of ensuring our efforts would not be in vain; 'the highest good is possible in the world only on the supposition of a supreme cause of nature' as he puts it in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, and this - in so far as it acted 'through understanding and will' - could only be God. Thus Kant's God appears as the benign insurance agent, the *deus ex machina* who ensures the final fruit of our moral pursuits. Similarly Kant postulated the immortality of the soul, for only on such an assumption could the goal of moral perfection be realised, through 'endless progress'. Such postulations as the existence of God and immortality of the soul could not of course be epistemologically vouchsafed, but were founded rather on the 'faith of pure practical reason', securely founded itself on the authoritative deliverances of moral consciousness.

Kant's understanding of practical reason and its realisation in performing categorical imperatives, together with his suggestion of a God who ensures such performances are not finally flawed, can be used to argue for

understanding participation in God as the exercise of practical reason in following categorical imperatives. We participate in universal reason, reason which is akin to some Platonic Form in being that in which we share actively as individuals as we exercise our reason, but which does not share the transcendence of the Platonic Form in that such universal reason is immanent within each of us, would that we might realise it.

To speak of participation in God as the exercise of practical reason in following categorical imperatives is of course a quite un-Kantian (and unbiblical) way of speaking, but Kant's thought at least leaves open the possibility of viewing things in this way. No epistemological certainty can be attached to such a claim, but there is, as a Kantian might say, room within Kant's epistemological framework to believe that this is the case. Furthermore, it is a belief which is afforded support by moral consciousness and practical reason, reasonable support not so apparent as with those doctrines of participation justified simply by the inward testimony of the Spirit. However one difficulty with such a position is that participation depends upon the exercise of freedom *in contrast to* inclination, instinct and natural drives, and it thus becomes a perpetual struggle. A second problem is that no concrete norms for action can be immediately deduced from Kant's thought; Kant has left us with a theory which gives us the moral law in its bare, universal form, without telling us what we ought to do. All we know is that we must abide by the principle of consistency or non-contradiction.

5.2 Hegelian Participation in Geist

Difficulties with Kant such as the two just mentioned are taken up by G.W.F.Hegel (1770-1831) who nevertheless felt a deep affinity with Kant and followed him in believing human beings to be unfree when acting from particular innate or socially conditioned desires, in believing that freedom is found in what is universal, in believing that reason is essentially universal and in seeing a connection between freedom and the development of the individual conscience. But while having such affinities with Kant, Hegel also felt drawn to a conception of life which might be termed 'expressivist', which reacted against the dissecting of the human being into body and soul, spirit and nature,

utilitarian conceptions of society and perspectives on nature which saw it as being there simply for human purposes. Against such tendencies expressivism stressed unity and wholeness (believing the human being could not be defined in its parts without distorting human reality and without breaking down the unity of being whose very wholeness enabled self-expression and self-fulfilment). Expressivism also emphasised freedom, not as independence in relation to external authority, nature, desires etc. but primarily as authentic self-expression. Freedom here becomes synonymous with self-realisation. Again expressivism looked for a deeper sense of communion with nature than was offered by many Enlightenment thinkers, seeking an interchange with a larger life rather than simply a rational vision of order. And finally Expressivism sought a greater communion between human beings than the Enlightenment vision granted of a society "made up of atomistic, morally self-sufficient subjects who enter into external relations with each other, seeking either advantage or the defence of civil rights".[5] The communion with one's fellow human beings must be deeper than this, and rest on a unity of shared natures, feelings and purposes, or so 'expressivists' hoped. The uniting of the concerns of expressivism with the free, rational, moral Kantian subject, this is one way of understanding Hegel's task. We shall see how Hegel develops this synthesis, paying particular regard to the way in which a notion of participation in God and our knowledge of such participation can be drawn out of his thought.

Hegel recognises certain oppositions which his thought needs to overcome. The knowing subject needs to be distinguished from the known object, and yet also needs to know the object thoroughly, bridging the gap between himself and the object. Again, we are to be free as rational agents which can mean suppressing our desires and inclinations, and yet we are to act out of motives which are really our own, so that to understand freedom in a way which opposes natural inclination is defective. Our development of self-consciousness requires that we distinguish ourselves from our community and yet we develop largely through interaction with others, so that we seem to need both individual independence and integration into a larger life. Finally there is the opposition between the free person and his/her fate, between what we do and what happens to us or, if one posits a cosmic spirit whose purposes unfold within history then between this infinite spirit and finite spirit, between the demands of

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[5] C.Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975), p.28

human autonomy and those of participation in the current of a larger life.

For such oppositions to be overcome we cannot simply return to some primitive state of unity between subject and nature. Rather Hegel thought that we must retain the fruits of the separations (such as our self-conscious rational autonomy) while looking to reconcile such fruits with a unity with nature, society and 'God'. Hegel believed that such a reconciliation of opposites was possible and that

> ..each item in these basic dichotomies when thoroughly understood shows itself to be not only opposed to but identical with its opposite. And when we examine things more deeply we shall see that this is so because at base the very relations of opposition and identity are inseparably linked to each other. They cannot be utterly distinguished because neither can exist on its own, that is, maintain itself as the sole relation holding between a given pair of terms.[6]

To see more clearly what Hegel means we might consider the case of the rational subject who cannot exist without being embodied. Reason requires embodiment as a precondition of its realisation, and yet this very embodiment reason has to struggle against if it is to be realised. In a sense then "the subject is both identical with and opposed to his embodiment".[7] Hegel considers the subject from the point of view of conditions of existence (embodiment) and from the point of view of the goals of reason and freedom; these are in conflict (Hegel would say even more strongly that they are in contradiction), and the relations of identity and opposition are held together in a temporal pattern; "primitive identity must give way to division which inevitably arises since the subject cannot but contain the seed of division within himself".[8] But reconciliation can follow on from the identity and division, as the subject makes over nature so as to reflect the human being's higher aspirations, to be an expression of reason and as the rational subject sees nature itself as part of a rational plan. Reconciliation involves the rational subject identifying "himself with this larger reason, the rational plan underlying the whole, and as such no longer sees himself as opposed to a nature which has itself been made over to be an apt expression of rationality".[9] Hegel reserved the term 'reason' (Vernunft) for this identification, this realisation of being part of a larger plan and identifying with it, using

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[6] C.Taylor, *Hegel*, p.80
[7] C.Taylor, *Hegel*, p.85
[8] C.Taylor, *Hegel*, p.86
[9] C.Taylor, *Hegel*, p.86

'understanding' (Verstand) for the perspective on things as divided or opposing.

The larger rational plan is that of Geist ('Mind' or 'Spirit") for Hegel. Geist or cosmic Spirit is understood as 'Subject' for Hegel, undergirding and manifesting itself in all reality. 'Subject' for Hegel is inescapably in need of expressing itself through a medium (embodiment) and is necessarily rational. The universe is for Hegel the "embodiment of the totality of the 'life-functions' of God, that is the conditions of his existence"[10], an expression of God[11], that which is posited by God in order to manifest what God is. This is not to say that God is what God is and then He decides to manifest Himself to the world and in the world; rather through the process of embodiment in the world (and in world-history) God comes to realise Himself, achieving a conscious grasp of his own nature:

> The cosmic subject is such that he is both identical and non-identical to the world. There is identity in that *Geist* cannot exist without the world; and yet also opposition for the world as externality represents a dispersal, an unconsciousness which *Geist* has to overcome to be itself, to fulfil its goal as self-conscious reason.[12]

The goal is Geist's self-realisation, self-consciousness or freedom, because for Hegel freedom consists in being *bei sich selbst*, sufficient to oneself :

> In other words being free is being related only to oneself, the lack of freedom is dependence on something else, something which is not 'I'. Being thus self-related is, in the case of Geist, being self-conscious, and so it transpires that the purpose of the world is for Geist to achieve full awareness of its own nature[13] .

In Hegelian language, Geist is to become for itself what it is in itself.

If the goal is self-consciousness, then Geist requires that it be set over and against an object as subject in order to reach that goal. This is because Hegel adopts Fichte's and Kant's notion that consciousness is necessarily bipolar,

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[10]C.Taylor, *Hegel*, p.88

[11] Craig rightly qualifies the identification of Geist and God in Hegel because "we must remember Hegel's penchant for the notion of 'identity-in-difference', and the fact that nature is equally to be seen as the Idea's 'Other' - similarly, nature and mind are 'Others' too, as well as being identifiable. From this perspective it is therefore proper to say that God is not one out of Idea, nature and Geist, to the exclusion of others, but that each is a part or aspect of him". See E.Craig's *The Mind of God and the Works of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p.179

[12] C.Taylor, *Hegel* , p.42

[13] E.Craig, *The Mind of God* , p.199

requiring the distinction of subject and object. Full awareness requires the existence of finite spirits through which awareness can be realised then, because to be set over and against objects is to be limited by something other and hence on Hegel's definition of the finite, to be finite. (For Hegel finitude means limited by something, whereas infinite means having no limits, not in the sense of going on forever but as including everything). We saw a little earlier that in the process of separation and reconciliation in a higher synthesis of nature and reason the human being came to see himself as part of a larger rational plan; now we can see that rational human beings are the very vehicles through whom this rational plan (of Geist coming to self-consciousness) is realised. Indeed human beings participate in the purposes of Geist as they come to realise their part in the process of Geist's embodiment of its own nature and journey to self-knowledge. But as well as coming to *know* itself, Geist is also making itself, through its activity, what it has implicitly always been; "Geist is only what it makes itself, and it makes itself what it potentially is".[14] So Hegel's philosophy is as much "Be Thyself" as it is "Know Thyself" in terms of Geist, and Geist's activity is not just "the acquisition of self-knowledge, nor just of creation, but of the self-creation of the creator, and whoever participates in it has a share in the making of God".[15] (And so here we see an intimate connection between ontology and epistemology in Hegelian thought, the goal of full self-consciousness being also the route to completed self-creation for Geist. Presumably this is also the case for human beings, i.e. as they realise their vocation in enabling Geist's self-realisation they too come to be self-conscious in a way quite different from their originary ontological condition).

Human beings participate in this activity of 'making God' both unwittingly and wittingly, both passively and actively. This is a typical example of Hegel's dual perspective. On the one hand "while such business of reality appears as the action and so as the work of *Individuals*, these are in respect of the substantial content of their work *tools*".[16] On the other hand,

> if we accept ... that we are to think of individuals as *means*, nonetheless there is a side of them which we hesitate just to think of only in these terms, even when measured against the highest

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14 Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. J.Sibtree (New York: Dover, 1956), Introduction, C (a)

15 Craig, *The Mind of God*, p.203

16 Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, Part III, para.551

standard, because it is simply not something inferior, but rather something in them which is itself eternal, divine.[17]

Our reason, that divine element within us, enables us to "participate in that purpose of reason itself"[18] , and so we are not only tools to be cast aside when Geist can finally gaze upon itself in all its rational, self-conscious splendour because Geist as such is not conscious. It becomes conscious of itself only in our minds so human minds must be the necessary vehicle of God's self-knowledge. And we realise our true purpose as Geist realises itself, only then realising that this was our true purpose all along, to become the vehicles of the self-knowledge of universal Spirit. Our final realisation of our role in the movement of Geist through history is properly grasped only philosophically, because only philosophy is able to grasp accurately the truth in a conceptually clear way. For Hegel, "Philosophy is knowledge, and it is through knowledge that man first realises his original vocation, to be the image of God."[19]

5.3 Hegel's Critique of Christianity

Hegel claims that Christianity when properly understood is nothing else than a profound representation of the self-realisation of Geist in history. The movement of consciousness to self-consciousness through self-recognition in the other and a resulting reconciliation and synthesis with the other is a dynamic Hegel perceives in the narrative of Jesus Christ, the God-man. For Hegel the Incarnation is not the mystery of one person in two natures, but rather a unique realisation of mutual divine-human self-recognition in otherness:

Incarnation implies that the absolute is not simply substance, but has the structure of self-consciousness. God's self-knowledge involves self-recognition in other, and is the result of mediation by others[20] .

The Spirit here is the dynamic process by which the event of Incarnation comes to be realised as much more than an historical moment, but as a consciousness, a certainty of the unity and union of divine and human natures,

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17 Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Introduction, B(b)

18 Ibid.

19 Craig, *The Mind of God*, p.180

20 R.R.Williams' article 'Hegelianism' in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. A.E.McGrath (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p.255

a consciousness with which the church or Spiritual Community begins; "and it is this consciousness which constitutes the truth upon which the Spiritual Community is founded".[21] The reconciliation of God with the world in Christ is shown by the fact that what is human is not alien to God's nature but this otherness, finitude and self-differentiation is actually a moment in God Himself (albeit a vanishing moment). And this grasp of reconciliation is also an awareness of the Trinitarian God, who is "but is at the same time the Other, the self-differentiating, the Other in the sense that this Other is God Himself and has potentially the divine nature in it, and that the abolishing of this difference, of this otherness, this return, this love, is Spirit".[22]

The locus of this process of return is, at least in *The Philosophy of Religion*, the Spiritual Community[23], whose actual, permanent existence is an eternal becoming "which is based on the fact that it is the very nature of Spirit to know itself as eternal, to liberate itself so as to form those finite flashes of light which make the individual consciousness, and then to collect itself again out of this finitude and comprehend itself"[24]; (in so doing the knowledge of its essence and consequently the divine self-consciousness appear in finite consciousness). But the Incarnation is duly qualified by this description, because it appears merely as a disappearing moment and as nothing essential, permanent or absolute. And further, while the persons of the church "reach the truth and appropriate it for themselves, and through it the Holy Spirit comes to be in them as real, actual and present, and has its abode in them"[25], yet there is still disunion and differentiation between the community and the divine Idea.

What the Christian religion fails to understand is that the unity of the Spiritual Community and the divine idea, the presence of the Spirit, occurs now in all its fullness; the Spiritual Community still sees the divine idea as an Other outside of consciousness given partly through authority and partly appropriated in acts

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[21] Hegel, *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. and trans. by E.B.Spiers and J.Burdon Sanderson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1895), vol. III, p.99

[22] Ibid., p.100

[23] Hegel identifies the church as the Spiritual community in that "in the Spiritual community as actually existing, the church is emphatically the institution in virtue of which the persons composing it reach the truth and appropriate it for themselves, and through it the Holy Spirit comes to be in them as real, actual and present, and has its abode in them". Ibid., p.124

[24] Ibid., p.124

[25] Ibid., p.124

of devotion; "to put it otherwise, the moment of communion is merely a single moment, or the divine Idea, the divine content is not actually seen, but is only represented in the mind".[26] With the Spiritual Community

..the Now or actuality of communion as thus represented is transferred partly to a region beyond, to a heaven beyond the present, partly to the past and partly to the future. Spirit, however, is above all things present, and demands a real and complete presence; it demands more than love merely, than sad ideas or mental pictures, it demands that the content should itself be present, or that the feeling, the sensation experienced should be developed and expanded.[27]

The Christian religion is vaguely aware of the divine Idea through the 'Vorstellungen' of God but such imagery, cognitive representations and pictorial ideas as religion contains always mean that its thought is restricted to understanding ('Verstand') and not reason. Such thought lacks the dialectical dimension because it has still not identified itself with the absolute, and hence with the Idea which goes over into its opposite and returns to itself. What is still required to be clearly and consciously known is that the reconciliation of God and human subject is actualised (as it is realised) in every human subject, that the movement of God in overcoming differences "signifies the telos of every human subject in the unity of universal self-consciousness".[28]

It is only in philosophy that Hegel believed the reconciliation could be realised with conceptual clarity and where an elucidation of the truths of faith could be realised in the form of the concept (Begriff) rather than in the form of representation (Vorstellung), images and symbols. This is an elucidation of truth in the form proper to truth for Hegel.[29] Whether Hegel's claim to preserve the truths of orthodox Christianity through his speculative philosophy is valid is questionable, and given his transformation of the Incarnation from a particular historical individual into a doctrine of divine-human community, his rejection of a two-nature Christology and eschatology, the necessity of creation to God and other conceptual 'clarifications' of faith, his claim seems somewhat far-fetched. In any case it is only in philosophy that Hegel believed the reconciliation could be properly set forth, a reconciliation of God with Himself and Nature, which

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[26] Hegel, *Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. III, p.134

[27] Ibid., p.134-135

[28] C.Marsh, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theological Critique of Hegel' in *SJT* Vol. 45, no.4 (1992), p.433

[29] See Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion,* vol. III, pp. 148-149

shows that Nature, 'Other-Being' is divine and "that it partly belongs to the very nature of finite Spirit to rise into the state of reconciliation, and that it partly reaches this state of reconciliation in the history of the world".[30]

5.4 Criticisms of Hegelian Participation

It is a commonplace criticism of Hegel that he leaves insufficient room for distinguishing the Creator and creation, persons human and divine. Difference and otherness are moments within the social-historical process of Geist's movement to self-realisation, moments to be overcome, sublated. To be fair to Hegel however it should be noted that Hegel believed that nothing of us is abandoned when we realise our true roles as vehicles of Geist. The difference between finite and infinite Spirit is not abolished but rather ultimate unity retains the differences within it. This is why Hegel uses terms for the resolution of differences such as 'reconciliation' (Versöhnung), and Aufhebung to refer to the dialectical transition in which a lower stage is both annulled and preserved in a higher one. Even so, this attempt to preserve unity in difference is hardly 'preservation' ultimately. The world of external physical things and finite spirits distorts the embodiment of Geist even as it externally presents it, and this is only corrected by external reality's necessary demise. Hence the necessity of death as the ultimate disappearance of any external reality. External reality is not preserved, nor are human beings in their particularity, although Geist continues to manifest itself in the ongoing movement of affirmation and denial.

We have seen that from the Hegelian perspective human beings participate in God as they become the vehicles of God's self-knowledge and share in the divine self-knowing. Further, we have seen that human beings participate in the making of God in a sense, so that participation has both epistemological and ontological dimensions. Considered epistemologically, one could say that human beings not only participate in the divine thought but that God's thought is no more than what is in our minds, "our consciousness is the consciousness of deity".[31] And when is our thought the divine thought? When exactly do we know that we are participating in God in other words? When are our thoughts 'true Thought'? In *The Logic* Hegel attempts to follow the development of the

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[30] Hegel, *Philosophy of Religion*, Vol.III, p.149

[31] Craig, *The Mind of God*, p.180

conceptual structure of the Idea, beginning with its origins in the concept of being. Hegel would like to show that there is really only one way in which the categories of the Logic can develop but as Craig points out,

> if the Logic convinces us, it does so in virtue of the fact that the transitions from category to category seem to us to meet certain standards. But whether these be *the* standards or only *our* standards it cannot itself tell us.[32]

We cannot it seems be sure that our thoughts belong to the self-consciousness of the Idea or that our thoughts are merely opinions and fancies. That Hegel assumes an identity between our thoughts and Thought allows him to argue that what we take to be real is in fact all that is real:

> the 'identity' between our mental processes and those which sustain reality guarantees the coincidence of the properties really instantiated with those available to our thought; the possibility that our minds are thus alienated from the real was not one that Hegel was tuned to.[33]

For Hegel the concept produces the truth - for such is subjective freedom - but at the same time it recognises this truth not as something produced, but as the true existing in and for itself. But this happy coincidence of a non-foundationalist positing and the object possessing in itself a reality independent of such positing is assumed by Hegel's metaphysical structure, rather than demonstrated. Perhaps Hegel lacks a high enough doctrine of self-delusion and too readily equates our thoughts with Thought, our grasp of reality as the Idea's sustaining grasp of reality, our view of the Real with the Real.

Under the Hegelian scheme participation in God is no longer simply about the fulfilment of God's purposes for humanity but it is also about fulfilling God's purposes for Himself. Participation in God by free, rational beings in terms of self-conscious awareness of Reality as it is, is necessary to the self-realisation of God. Humanity is divinized, and divinity humanised, not only in the particularity of the Incarnate Son of God but finally universally. Participation here has the elements of practice, agency and process about it, as well as the dimension of intellectual insight. Geist is concerned with working its purpose out, coming to consciousness of that which lies within it. Correspondingly the human being is called to participate in this process and indeed such

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[32] Craig, *The Mind of God*, p.11

[33] Craig, *The Mind of God*, p.194

participation is essential to Geist's purposes. Because "*Geist* is only what it makes itself, and it makes itself what it potentially is",[34] the involvement of rational creatures in this process means that human beings are essential participants in the making of God (and we have seen that this participation is both witting and unwitting for Hegel). Interestingly our participation in God is both that process by which we come to know God and that activity by which we carry out his purposes, a fusion of two tasks which we will take up later.

It would be wrong to assert that Hegelian participation is restricted to purely intellectual acts of right thinking because Hegel stresses how our actions in history bring about Geist's self-realisation. While Geist rises to self-consciousness in *our minds*, this process of Geist's self-realisation is also one realised historically, more and less adequately in the various human societies developed. Society's structure may reflect the various moments of the idea's process of self-realisation (unmediated unity, separation, mediated unity), and we are called to be participants in a society which is articulated according to the Idea. Without detailing Hegel's understanding of such a society, we might note in passing that concretely this means firstly that the human being must be recognised as a rational subject and given the rights of an autonomous individual. Secondly the state must be ruled by a law treating all alike. But thirdly (and going beyond Kant here), Hegel sees a set of obligations relating to furthering and sustaining a society founded on the idea and labelled by him as Sittlichkeit. We have obligations to the community to which we belong and our rational, free execution of such obligations enable Geist's self-expression. Not only is the individual serving Geist's purposes by pursuing such obligations, but the individual is serving a larger goal which is also the ground of his identity:

> for Hegel everything that man is he owes to the state; only in it can he find his essence. All value that a man has, all spiritual reality, he has only through the state.[35]

Particularly significant in Hegel's discussion of Sittlichkeit and the advancement of the state is the way human social action comes to the fore. Participation involves active, ethical involvement in society and Craig is right to note that Hegel contributed greatly to that style of thought which "by stressing human

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34 Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Introduction C(a)

35 Hegel, *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. J.Hoffmeister (Hamburg,1955), p.111

autonomy and creativity, turns the philosophical spotlight away from the divine mind and the knowledge of its works and on to *the works of man*".[36] Even so we should remember that Hegel's 'cunning reason' runs ahead of human activity ensuring that the history of the universe unfolds according to an inner purpose. This removes some of the potency of human activity because although there is contingency in human action, such contingency itself serves to realise the necessary plan of things so that, to speak theologically, God in His providence gives rein to human passions and interests but nevertheless ensures that what happens is the fulfilment of His intentions. It is however a short step from Hegel's thought to some examples of Process theology, where the "cunning of reason" is replaced by a (terrifying) human responsibility for making God the God He will be.

5.5 Bonhoeffer: The Quest for Unity Without Loss of Identity

Hegel's emphasis on the Spiritual Community as the place of human/divine reconciliation and the locus of epistemological access to God and God's purposes would be more acceptable to orthodox Christianity if the Spiritual Community was less the State and more the church. Again the Spirit's role in overcoming alienation between human beings and God and between human beings is attractive, but Hegel fails to retain the distinctiveness of Creator and creatures in this process. Further, Hegel provides important groundwork for understanding the vital nature of reciprocal recognition of others essential for dialogue, development and emancipation but he finally undermines this stress on intersubjectivity with his all-consuming Absolute Subject. One theologian who can be seen as building on Hegel's thoughts in a way which seeks to overcome such objections is D.Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer retains personal differences but argues for a unity in Christ of God and humanity, and he sees the church as the place of God's epistemological self-disclosure.

5.6 The Community of Christ

For the early Bonhoeffer the *cor curvum in se* of the individual is broken open in the act of faith in Christ;

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[36] Craig, *The Mind of God*, p.174

> In the act of belief, which Christ himself creates within me, inasmuch as he gives me the Holy Spirit, who hears and believes within me, he also proves himself the free Lord of my existence. Christ "is" only in faith, yet he "is" master of my faith.[37]

Such an analysis immediately eliminates individualism because the cor curvum in se is broken open both to the neighbour and God; "existence in this sense (existence which undergoes impact from beyond itself) is existence in social relation, existence in relation to Christ".[38] In contrast to Hegel, for Bonhoeffer "the differences between self and other are not epistemologically overcome, but are recognised as part of the concrete whole of revelation".[39] For Bonhoeffer there is a unity which contains a constitutive difference between persons rather than a unity within which differences are finally sublated in the absolute subject's self-consciousness; for Bonhoeffer "the one who is united with me in what we intend is structurally just as separate from me as the one who is not so united with me. Between us there is the boundary of those who have been created as individual persons".[40] The thou alone provides a real boundary through which deadly isolation can be broken and genuine sociality established, a boundary in no way nullified but acknowledged in the Spirit-inspired movement towards the thou. Further, the thou of the neighbour and the thou of God belong together for Bonhoeffer:

> Social community is in essence given with community with God. The latter is not what leads to the former. Community with God is not without social community, nor is social community without community with God.[41]

Like Hegel, the community is the place of reconciliation of humanity and God, but this reconciliation is understood in a way which protects the distinctiveness of both human beings and God.

It is Christology which enables Bonhoeffer to speak of the unity of the difference of the I and the other, of human beings and God, because for Bonhoeffer Christ

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[37] D.Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, trans. B.Noble (London: Collins, 1962), p.141

[38] D.Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, p.127

[39] C.Marsh, 'Bonhoeffer's Critique of Hegel', p.435

[40] D,Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith et al. (London: Collins, 1963), p.54

[41] This passage appears on p.37 of the German edition of *Sanctorum Communio* but was not translated for the English edition which put in its place material from the appendix of the German edition. See Ernst Feil's *The Theology Of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), p.208, n.10

is the subject of this unity. Marsh notes how Bonhoeffer explains this point by addressing the problem of the divine knowing, explaining Bonhoeffer's enigmatic statement that "God is in revelation only in the act of understanding Godself"[42] as meaning "that the subject of the act of the divine knowing is God Godself; what is being revealed is Christ existing as community, and thus 'my knowledge of God is bound up with whether God has known me in Christ'".[43] The fact that the locus is community makes for separateness because of the personal-structural character of community while God is not lost to us in His transcendence because God here is not primarily *bei sich selbst* but *bei uns.* Two differences between Bonhoeffer's analysis and Hegel's should be noted. First God freely binds his knowing in communal form, without the community being a prerequisite for God's own understanding of Himself. Second, God's act of self-understanding is not realised simply in the human I but in the community, so that revelation has an essentially communal reference.

The community Bonhoeffer has in mind here is not the 'Constantinian' community of Hegelianism but one "where testimony is given to the foundation of all reality in Jesus Christ"[44], and reconciliation in this community is understood by Bonhoeffer not in terms of the rational mastery of philosophical thinking but rather primarily in terms of an ethical responsibility towards others. Bonhoeffer stresses the importance of the actus directus in contrast to the actus reflectus in the Christian community, indeed "the knowledge of Jesus is entirely transformed into action, without any reflection upon the human self".[45] Not of course that we are released from a responsible weighing up of what actions might be appropriate but

that we finally do not know whether we are good or evil and are, therefore, dependent on grace is

[42] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, p.92

[43] Marsh, ibid., p.440 One wonders whether Origen's development of the stoical understanding of God containing the universe lies behind this analysis ultimately. Origen spoke of God containing the universe by comprehending it and in that act of comprehension lies both the delimitation of that which is comprehended and its creation. (On this understanding what is not comprehended by God does not exist nor have limits). This understanding lends itself to the idea of our recreation in Christ because now we are known in and through the incarnate, crucified and risen Christ we are a new creation. However not only are we as creatures a new creation, but also our faith is a new creation, faith being God's gift of knowledge of who He is in Christ and who we are to Him in Christ. This faithful knowledge is relational, personal and propositional but precisely as God's knowledge primarily we cannot rip it from its roots in God and adopt such knowledge independently of relation (in worship and service) to God. Faith is the gracious correlate of God's knowing us in Christ.

[44] D.Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan Collier ed., 1986), p.202

[45] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p.34

part and parcel of responsible, historical action .. The responsible person lives by God's grace into whose hands his or her action is placed.[46]

In this way Bonhoeffer seeks to distinguish the ideologue from the responsible person; "when the deed is performed with a responsible weighing up of all the personal and objective circumstances and in the awareness that God has become human and that it is *God* who has become human, then this deed is delivered up solely to God at the moment of its performance".[47] The circumstances are provided by the context in which we find ourselves, and there are no programmes, ideals or laws which necessarily apply, other than obedience to Christ. As Marsh explains Bonhoeffer wants the concreteness of community to be in its purest expression responsible action, not consummate thinking: "He (Bonhoeffer) wants theology to be primarily *nachfolgen*, a responsiveness prior to *nachdenken*".[48]

But while active obedience to Christ is the way in which God and community are known to be reconciled in Christ and the manner of participation in that knowledge, this ethical orientation is not focused on the appropriation of the other whom one serves in a higher synthesis involving a greater self-consciousness, but remains focused on the other, not "to return as a recovered I, but to remain, as an extended self, always more than I".[49] None of this entails that in order to be part of the reconciled community is to be ethical; we are already reconciled for "the world is not divided between Christ and the devil, but, whether it recognises it or not, it is solely and entirely the world of Christ".[50] The church bears witness to Christ and the reconciliation of the world with God through Him, it is the place, "the space in the world, at which the reign of Jesus Christ over the whole world is evidenced and proclaimed".[51] The ethical dimension refers to the way in which that reign is witnessed to and it is primarily about Christ's becoming real and taking form in us rather than being about our conformation to Christ.[52]

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46 Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. E.Bethge (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1958-74), vol.III, p.461

47 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p.235

48 Marsh, 'Bonhoeffer's Critique of Hegel', p.446

49 Marsh, 'Bonhoeffer's Critique of Hegel', p.446

50 *Ethics*, p.204

51 *Ethics*, p.202

52 *Ethics*, p.79

5.7 Bonhoefferian Participation

How then are we to understand our participation in God from a Bonhoefferian perspective? Bonhoeffer writes in note form;

> Encounter with Jesus Christ. The experience that a transformation of all human life is given in the fact that 'Jesus is there only for others'. His 'being there for others' is the experience of transcendence. It is only this 'being there for others', maintained till death, that is the ground of his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Faith is participation (*das Teilnehmen*) in this being of Jesus (incarnation, cross and resurrection). Our relation to God is not a 'religious' relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being imaginable - that is not authentic transcendence - but our relation to God is a new life in 'existence for others', through participation (*Teilnahme*) in the being of Jesus.[53]

In his earlier work Bonhoeffer stressed how this being-for-others, this ex-centric orientation towards others, was faith itself, where the cor curvum in se is broken open by Christ's call to which we respond with obedient service which "proves to be an act of faith in the word of Christ".[54] God's call is not isolated to particular individuals in a way that excludes relatedness to others, because the very knowing that one is called occurs within a communal context (socially, linguistically and liturgically), and the architecture of the call is a structure of relations orientating one ex-centrically towards others in a way which enables the transformed individual identity to emerge. The response to this call is an act of obedient faithfulness, of faithful obedience, and *is* our active participation in Christ. Faith for Bonhoeffer is in its inner meaning action, obedience to Christ, and the very act of believing is for Bonhoeffer our participation in Christ's way of being. Bonhoeffer is able to combine here the individuality of Christ's call to us and Christ's presence to us as it is mediated and dwells among us. McFadyen explains that

> Christ is present in genuine individuality. But if individuality is one's spirit of communication, the way one enters into relations and is for others, then, by very definition, this individual conformation is best understood from its relatedness rather than from its isolation... 'Being in Christ' or 'Christ in me' indicate not an isolated individuality but an individual's ex-centric constitution in answer to an extrinsic call, an orientation on that which is individually transcendent. The presence of Christ is not an indication of an essence but a movement with others towards 'Christ between us'.[55]

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53 D,Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, trans. R.Fuller et al. (New York , Macmillan, 1972), (hereafter LPP), p.381

54 D.Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R.Fuller (New York, Macmillan, 1963), p.72

55 A.McFadyen, 'The Call to Discipleship: Reflections on Bonhoeffer's Theme 50 Years On' in *SJT*, vol.43, no.4 (1990), p.477

In the light of this analysis Christ's presence to us is to be understood as that presence, "that formative ground of the dynamic movement in which we transcend ourselves and, in this transcendence, become ourselves".[56] And yet Christ is also the one who draws us out of ourselves in a transcendent movement so that "Christ is therefore 'in' us as the ground of this self-transcendence, as a centre within us pushing us outwards, and as a centre beyond us pulling us towards God and others".[57] Bonhoeffer's statement that "Christ stands between us, and we can only get into touch with our neighbours through him"[58] reminds us that for Bonhoeffer genuine relationships in which the transcendence of another is respected can only be assured as the other's presence is mediated by Christ; indeed only through Christ can we engage with the authentic otherness of neighbour and God at all.

Whereas for Hegel the engagement with otherness occurs within the state, through various historical epochs and successive modes of consciousness, for (certainly the early Bonhoeffer) the locus is the church, that place where our transformed individual identities emerge from our ex-centric orientation and where our relations are 'redeemed'. Word and sacrament provide ways in which the form of the community is created and such a community is revelatory because "the Word is also itself community in so far as the community is itself revelation and the Word wills to have the form of a created body".[59] Community becomes the mode of existence of the one who is present in his exaltation and humiliation[60].

Bonhoeffer has little place for pneumatology according to our summary so far. Bonhoeffer's later, suggestive reflections in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* are also lacking a considered pneumatology, an omission which neglects that person of the Trinity concerned with establishing communion for the "Spirit

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[56] Ibid., p.477

[57] Ibid., p.478. Zizioulas understands this ek-static movement as the very ground of our freedom and personhood; "..personhood implies the 'openness of being', and even more than that, the *ek-stasis* of being, i.e. a movement towards communion which leads to a transcendence of the boundaries of the 'self' and thus to *freedom*". See his "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity". Whether Zizioulas is as able as Bonhoeffer to distinguish persons human and divine given his undergirding ontology is however questionable.

[58] Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, p.88

[59] D.Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, trans. E.H.Robertson (London; Collins, 1966), p.60

[60] Ibid., p.62

relates to one another beings and realms that are opposed or separate".[61] And within this the Spirit affirms the particularity of those He so relates so that "God the Spirit is the source of autonomy, not homogeneity, because by his action human beings are constituted in their uniqueness and particular networks of relationality".[62] Hegel contributed to an understanding of Spirit as enabling self-transcendence but which did not preserve particularity finally while Bonhoeffer, who spoke occasionally of our 'transcendence', did not link this with the Spirit's initiating and enabling action. The earlier Bonhoeffer is more alert to the significance of pneumatology, stressing the way in which the Spirit imparts true knowledge of Christ's being and will, of how because of the Spirit "we are not without knowledge of Christ and of the gifts which God has given us in him (1 Cor. 2:12, Eph. 1:9). The gift which the Holy Spirit creates in us is not uncertainty, but assurance and discernment".[63] Again the role of the Spirit in relation to Christ is central to the notion of ethics and participation for Bonhoeffer;

> The place which in all other ethics is occupied by the antithesis of 'should be' and 'is', idea and accomplishment, motive and performance, is occupied in Christian ethics by the relation of reality and realisation, past and present, history and event (faith), or, to replace the equivocal concept by the unambiguous name, the relation of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The question of good becomes the participation in the divine reality which is revealed in Christ.[64]

The Spirit acts by making us aware of the personal Other, in particular Christ; the Spirit elicits a decision from us concerning that which is Other, and with the Spirit there is a "continuous substitution of the principle of self-sacrifice on behalf of another for the natural drive of self-interest and dominance".[65] Bonhoeffer did not elaborate on his pneumatology in a manner which would reassure us that the Spirit helps to safeguard the particularity of those whom the Spirit engages, but there is room to build on his remarks in a way which does affirm individuality within community, individuality which the Hegelian Geist in contrast finally absorbs in its universal self-consciousness.

Participation for Bonhoeffer then involves active obedience focused on the

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61 C.Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p.181
62 Ibid., p.184
63 Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, p.259
64 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p.190
65 John V.Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, p.109

Incarnate Christ and human beings outside of oneself; it involves concrete decisions, encounters, risk-taking and wholesale commitment. There is a particular emphasis on participation in the sufferings of God (which echoes one aspect of the theme of participation in Paul's writings, and in theologians such as Augustine and Calvin), as a way of "allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ".[66] The context we find ourselves in is emphasised, and there are no timeless or contextless prescriptions or legal criteria which we can follow which will assure us of our participation in God.

5.8 An Epistemology of Participation

So how do we know we are participating in God? Jüngel has noted how Bonhoeffer's theology of the cross suggests the dialectic of presence and absence in the divine being's relation to the world, God being the One who explodes the alternative of presence and absence[67]; the omnipresence of God has to be understood now "on the basis of his very presence on the cross of Jesus and not without a Christologically established removal of God".[68] God is the God who would have us know that we must manage our lives without him - and this is the God before whom we stand for Bonhoeffer; "before God and with God we live without God".[69] This raises even more sharply the question of awareness of our participation in God. Thielicke asks the pertinent question of "How in a *positive* sense does God become experienceable anew in the changed modern situation?"[70] The beginnings of an answer to these kinds of questions appears to rest on our active commitment. We can neither experience nor know God or our participation in God without personally committing ourselves to Him in the way we lead our lives. To commit ourselves is to participate in Christ and particularly to participate in Christ's sufferings and

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66 Bonhoeffer, LPP, p.361 This militates against the Nietzschen claim that religious and in particular Christian truth-claims are in part about manipulation and the disguised bid for power. And the example of Bonhoeffer's personal resistance militates against Nietzsche's charge that Christian theology is motivated by desires for comfort, security, passivity and self-affirmation. Christianity may sometimes breed mediocrity and scandalous passive resignation but this is not necessarily authentic Christianity. Nor is it authentic participation, which we have seen throughout the Christian tradition carrys a stress on sharing in the sufferings of Christ, not out of a slave-mentality but out of a faithful commitment to God's promises.

67 E.Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), p.62

68 Ibid., p.63

69 Bonhoeffer, LPP, p.360

70 Jüngel, ibid., p.63, n.20

powerlessness for Bonhoeffer, and also to know that we are so participating in Christ. To see this we are not to understand knowledge in the sense of a subject understanding an object from a distance, but against a background of personal knowledge such as that which Michael Polanyi has set out.

Polanyi assumes that all rational discourse takes place within a tradition that accepts some things as given, and in Christianity it is certain beliefs that are given (albeit beliefs varying between traditions). There are those who are explicit about the beliefs on which they rely, and those who are unaware of it simply because they have accepted without reflective criticism the reigning dogma of their culture. (Both parties assume 'tacit' knowledge, knowledge of which we are not fully self-conscious which enables us to recognise faces in a crowd, to know a problem is such as to be worth pursuing, and so on.) The former are the better-advised group because of course it is an illusion to assume we have available to us a kind of knowledge which does not rest on faith commitments.[71] We cannot keep an 'objective distance' if we would know the truths of faith because such truths are not to be known by spectators[72] but by players; the knowledge involved here is not primarily 'knowledge that' but knowledge by acquaintance; knowledge is relational (in terms of relating the knower and the known) before it is propositional. A key metaphor for Polanyi is 'indwelling'; we know the world around us by indwelling our bodies, tools and language. These are tacitly known, a set of particulars of which we are only subsidiarily aware,as we attend from them to other parts of the world, which can become known because we indwell such 'apparatus'. Polanyi speaks of the

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71 Roy Clouser in his book *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1991), shows in detail how major theories in Mathematics, Physics and Psychology rest on presuppositions which are fundamentally theological in the sense that they posit the existence (not demonstrable a priori) of some reality on which everything else depends and which is not dependent on anything else. Without some such starting-point, systematic thought cannot begin.

72 Using Polanyi's approach implicitly undermines that school of thought which understands the telos of participation in ocular terms, as some kind of beatific vision. In our view this notion, rooted in a particular reading of Platonic contemplation, lacks that sense of engaged relationality which is at the heart of the notion. Philosophically, epistemological interpretations of the world understood through visual metaphor have been seriously (if excessively) criticised by R.Rorty, see his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton, 1979). What the visual metaphor does convey however is something of the aesthetic quality of participation. Consequently we would not wish to exclude the metaphor entirely. Rather, as I.T.Ramsey might have put it, such language requires *qualifying* by other language and should not be used in isolation from or in priority over other models. See his *Religious Language. An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases* (London: SCM, 1957).

"personal participation" of the knower in acts of understanding as the knower indwells certain tools or particulars as extensions of bodily equipment through which comprehension of the objects of focal awareness is achieved.[73] Polanyi argues that

> such knowing is indeed *objective* in the sense of establishing contact with a hidden reality; a contact that is defined as the condition for anticipating an indeterminate range of yet unknown (and perhaps yet inconceivable) true implications. It seems reasonable to describe this fusion of the personal and the objective as Personal Knowledge. Personal Knowledge is an intellectual commitment, and as such is inherently hazardous. Only affirmations that could be false can be said to convey objective knowledge of this kind.[74]

Polanyi applies his understanding of tacit knowing to the case of learning, arguing that we have tacit knowledge which dwells in our awareness of particulars while bearing on an entity which the particulars jointly constitute. In order to share this indwelling, the pupil must presume that a teaching which appears meaningless to start with has in fact a meaning which can be discovered by hitting on the same kind of indwelling as the teacher is practising. Such an effort is based for Polanyi on accepting the teacher's authority. Applying this to Christianity we might expect that the kind of teaching which Jesus gives is borne out in its truthfulness by 'indwelling' such teaching in the manner the teacher practices. This entails the sort of commitment which begins with a tacit knowledge of the 'rightness' of Jesus' witness and the clues provided by it to the nature of reality and our present and teleological state in it. Our tacit knowledge includes the tradition of Christianity as we find it in our worshipping communities. What triggers our participation in Christ here is the Holy Spirit, who enables us to commit ourselves to Christ and whose presence may be such that we are only tacitly aware of Him. Further, just as for Polanyi the world 'gives itself' to be known 'invading' our understanding, so too we can understand that God in Jesus Christ gives Himself to be known through the Holy Spirit.[75]

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[73] M.Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (London; Routledge & Kegan Paul), p.vii

[74] M.Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p.vii-viii

[75] Part of this gift is a desire and a trusting, positive appreciation of that to which one commits oneself. More broadly E.Farley reserves the term participation for a positive kind of wonder in which "we understand what is other in the mode of empathetic appreciation", a knowledge which moves beyond the merely egocentric and pragmatic and which is drawn by "the vulnerable and pathetic beauty of things". See his *Good & Evil* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), p.208. Ignoring the danger in Farley's thought that the mystery and beauty of the sacred is realised *only* through mediating worldly wonders, his stress on appreciation, aesthetic attraction and empathy with that which we seek to understand is an important reminder that our commitment is partly drawn out by the sheer attractiveness of God.

Participation in Christ is ever in danger of being corrupted by participators into an impersonal, static mode of being, such as might involve a disengaged ritualism and/or habitual actions which express regularised convention more than personal commitment. There is of course development in terms of participation, as for instance when "personal participation changes from an impetuous pouring out of oneself into channels of untried assumptions, into a confident holding of certain conclusions as part of one's interpretative framework".[76] But what is vital is that the development involves deepening of personal relations within the community and God, developments which must resist assimilation, control and epistemological reductionism (to merely propositional knowledge). Such temptations are resisted as the cor curvum in se is broken through by the Spirit enabling our commitment to God and neighbour in Christ, because Christ protects the transcendence of the Other and also provides the ontological ground for unity with the other. (The Incarnation bridges the divine-human divide, the cross enables God's forgiveness and our reconciliation with God, ourselves and others, the resurrection embodying the unbreakability and final assurance of this unity). The church here becomes the locus of participation because it is to this community that God has promised to bind Himself (freely though not necessarily exclusively) and in particular in His act of self-knowledge. The worshipping community is promised God's abiding presence and guidance in terms of the Spirit, who orientates the community towards Christ, enabling participation in Christ as worship is rightly rendered and fellow human beings are respected, affirmed, valued and served in their God-created, God-redeemed, God-purposed difference in unity. Participation in Christ includes both the Spirit's action in bringing us to faith in Christ and the inseparable commitment to Christ which expresses itself in ethics and praise. This active commitment brings in its wake the "knowledge of faith", an assurance derived from commitment to Christ through the Holy Spirit, bolstered by the indwelling of the Spirit who brings a sense of Christ's presence to us, and fostered by our worship and service, by which Christ takes form within us and through which we actively embrace ourselves as redeemed creatures. This knowledge is not the 'rational' certainty of objective knowledge, nor is it the certainty of a constantly sensed presence. This is rather a knowledge resting on beliefs and commitments which can be doubted, a knowledge of the gracious God who leads us into a knowledge of Him by a love which calls forth the

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[76] Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p.172

commitment of faith.

5.9 Conclusion

We have noted how Hegel criticised Kant for the way in which the moral subject has no concrete norms of action to perform but is left freely and arbitrarily to create his own through the exercise of his rational autonomous will. A Kantian approach which might regard the goal as participation in that principle of reason immanent in all of us is replaced in Hegelian thought by the goal of Geist's self-realisation and self-knowledge which rational creatures are called to participate in and which participation also effects their self-realisation. Hegel advocates Geist's freedom as self-creation, being keen to show (though unconvincing in the event) the necessary steps of Geist's self-creation to self-consciousness, steps which give human beings a context and orientation for their thoughts and actions, steps which human beings wittingly and unwittingly participate in. But once the focus of such self-creation switches to the human being (as with Marx and some Hegelians ill at ease with Hegel's overarching ontology of Geist), one is left with a conception of freedom as self-dependence, a situationless freedom once again where human beings seek self-realisation and self-dependence over and against "imposed values'. The Nietzschen will to power comes to the fore in all its meaningless (because situationless) independence.

Twentieth century philosophy has reacted by understanding the situation in which our freedom, our subjectivity is set. (Polanyi, Heidegger and others spring to mind). The massive developments in the philosophy of language can also be seen in part as seeking to define subjectivity in situation because, as Charles Taylor notes, once we go beyond seeing language merely as the referral of words to things and appreciate language as "the vehicle of a certain mode of consciousness which we achieve through speech"[77], then we must ask how language relates to other modes of awareness, how it is situated. Linguistic meaning depends for its understanding on the context in which it is set, and only by reflection on the context (practices, activities, states of affairs, etc.) can understanding occur.

Hegel's use of language is not simply descriptive, in that for example "revelation

[77] C.Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society,* p.163

in religion and philosophy completes the *realisation* of the Absolute and does not simply *portray* it".[78] However the descriptive, conceptual goal (achieved through our role as vehicles of Geist's self-consciousness) shows the priority of the descriptive dimension for Hegel. And so Hegel shows himself to be worshipping descriptive, conceptual thought in the end, in all its 'glorious' self-sufficiency and conceptual clarity. We must take sides against Hegel here, believing that our explicit, reflected thought has roots in an implicit background of unreflected experience and understanding (with Polanyi et al.)

Bonhoeffer, with his stress on commitment, faithful obedience and obedient faithfulness would appear to provide a promising contrast to Hegel's thought. But (at least the later) Bonhoeffer shows an inverted Hegelianism in that he is so focused on a broad-based participation in Jesus' way of being-for-others that there seems little room left for the significance of the 'Vorstellungen' of Christian doctrine and theology. People serve God wittingly and/or unwittingly as they immerse themselves in life's problems and challenges, forwarding the purposes of God by their other-oriented participation in the world's complexities. Awareness of this as a participation in Christ is unnecessary once being in Christ is reduced to "existing for others". Bonhoeffer takes the secularity of modern culture so seriously as a proper way of being and speaking in the world in its integrity and otherness that the question of the significance of theological language and the forms of life in which Christian action are embedded is left hanging in mid-air;

> the questions to be answered would surely be: What do a church, a community, a sermon, a liturgy, a Christian life mean in a religionless world?...How do we speak (or perhaps we cannot now even 'speak' as we used to) in a 'secular' way about 'God'?.[79]

Indeed why speak of God at all?

The challenge is to understand our participation in Christ in a wholistic sense, as involving reason, ethical action and worship, retaining a sense of language as a vehicle of a mode of consciousness which provides a description of and enables (in conjunction with our actions etc.) our active participation in God as we orient ourselves towards God and our neighbour in Christ through the Spirit.

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[78] Ibid., p.165

[79] Bonhoeffer, LPP, p.280

We retain this wholistic sense only as we focus on participation in the 'whole' Christ, not simply an ethical following of the Bonhoefferian 'man-for-others' or a philosophical apprehending of an Hegelian example of divine-human self-recognition in (an)other leading to a higher divine-human synthesis.

Bonhoeffer's Christ lacks that emphatic stress on the *knowledge* of the Father that the Son has[80], and our participation in Christ is as much about participation in the mutual knowing between the Father and the Son (through the Spirit) as it is about participation in Christ's obedient service. Incarnation includes the assumption of human mind and human word "in such a way that our human word is now renewed in him and sanctified to be the proper instrument of divine revelation, and .. truly understanding the human speech (*lalia*) of Jesus Christ is .. the faithful hearing of his eternal Word (*logos*)".[81] The way we speak and what we say is a vital part of our knowledge of God and our language is an integral part of our participation in God; it is not just that practice gives words their sense as Wittgenstein notes, though that is true, but that words, theological words, are so intertwined with our faithful actions that they both inform and give focus to our actions too. They are part of our actions.[82] It is almost as if Bonhoeffer is a part of that breach of word and world which Steiner notes is characteristic of modernity, as if we (the church) can jettison so much of the grammar by which we grasp 'God' and ourselves and the world, and still grasp the world in a meaningful way. Perhaps we could do so if language games functioned in isolation from each other, but we would dispute this (pace Lyotard), and argue that it has no basis in Wittgenstein's thought, as Fergus Kerr notes.[83] And perhaps we could do so if the relationship of language and ontology was loose-knit, if language of one sort or another were simply so many different garments overlaying reality. In this way we could conceive of participation in God occurring with the aid of language, but just as with Platonic participation the world is finally left behind, so with this scenario language is finally jettisoned and we are left with a naked immediacy. This intuitively appealing thought must

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80 E.g. Jn. 6:46, 7:29, 8:55, 10:15, 17:25, Lk. 10:22, Mt. 11:27

81 K.P.Seng, 'The Epistemological Significance of 'Ομοούσιον' in the Theology of Thomas.F. Torrance', *SJT*, vol.45, no.3 (1992), p.349

82 J.L.Austin shows in particular how certain 'performatives' by their very utterance embody action. An example would be the words "I do" in the context of a wedding ceremony. See his *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).

83 See Fergus Kerr's *Theology After Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p.31

be resisted as Wittgenstein noted (in a different context). Language is not a means to reality but an integral part of reality, part of the giftedness of our humanity, by which (in its proper use) we are oriented to one another without collapsing into one another, where immediacy is appropriately mediated. Language is part of the creation which is restored in Jesus Christ so that, as our words and minds are opened by the Spirit to the Word and participate in that Word, we share in Christ's knowing of the Father.[84] And it is the Spirit we rely upon for relating language to the truth about God

> who relates the divine Being to our forms of thought and speech and realises the relation of our forms of thought and speech to the Truth of God - what cannot be done by our thinking or stating is done by His *action* as Spirit as He lets the eternal Light of God shine through himself into our minds and enlightens our understanding that we may hear and discern God and think and speak truly of Him.[85]

Polanyi's epistemology can help us to see how knowledge of God arises within us as faithful commitment and acknowledgement of God which is a response to God's movement towards us in the Spirit as He enables us to participate in Christ, a participation involving knowledge. The relationship in which this knowledge occurs is not individualistic because the faithful community - with its traditions, language, structures of authority etc. - provides the framework for articulate knowledge. Our knowledge is prevented from degenerating into individualistic fantasies by a communal base which provides markers for our conceptuality and creativity.[86] Knowledge is not merely propositional, but forged primarily as knowledge by acquaintance, acquaintance realised in worship and in service of neighbour. (Consequently knowledge is much more

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[84] T.F.Torrance reminds us that God is "pleased to accept our service and to confer upon our thought, as it falls under the action of His Spirit and Word, the truth of His own Being. By its very nature, therefore, theological activity has its objective basis not in itself but in God, and must never presume to find its truth in itself but only in Him. A genuine theology will always be open to the questioning and speaking of the Spirit so that it may never become an undertaking on its own but may ever be meek and obedient service to God's own testimony to Himself". See his *God and Rationality* (London: OUP, 1971), p.181f

[85] T.F.Torrance, ibid., p.186. E.Jüngel writes memorably of how the 'interpretation of revelation by language is an event in which language is "commandeered" by revelation', see his *Doctrine of the Trinity*, trans H.Harris (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press,1966), p.13

[86] A.Thiselton argues for the stability of linguistic markers within the Christian tradition which are 'backed' with patterns of life and service reflecting that integrity of word and deed embodied in Jesus Christ. See his *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self. On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), pp.33-43. Bonhoeffer's underplaying of such linguistic markers may have been rooted in part in his experience of the German Church's refusal to link such markers with a Christological pattern of service focused in particular on the Jewish people.

than revelation as communication, participatory knowledge having the broader context of communion about it, communion within which revelation occurs). But epistemological access could still be accused of being an individualistic quest, albeit a quest whose context is the faithful community. What undermines this criticism is the fact that knowledge is mediated by God through the community and if that knowledge is separated from the community it is also severed from its foundation in God and loses any claim to being knowledge of God (which can only occur as the correlate of God knowing us in Christ). Further, if God binds Himself to the community then we avoid both occasionalism and control of grace. The former is avoided because God is always tied in some way to the community (conflicting, comforting, clarifying..) and there is (perhaps) always someone somewhere hearing God's Word spoken to them within the community and the latter is avoided because we cannot tie this revelation to specific individuals or materials in specific contexts.

Have we got any further than Calvin? Is a Polanyian version of the early Bonhoeffer not as subjectivistic as Calvin's inner assurance of the Holy Spirit? If epistemological certainty is the goal then one could argue we have got no further because a Polanyian understanding suggests that our knowing is a personal act occurring within a given framework of beliefs, relations and idioms. There can be 'universal intent' here but not 'pure objective knowledge'.[87] Even so perhaps we have got further, not in the sense of *expressions* ultimately that different from Calvin's but in rejecting the misguided Enlightenment pursuit of necessary, certain objective knowledge, and in distinguishing personal knowledge from subjectivism. The charge of communal relativism remains however, and some would wish to see compelling rational foundations which are epistemologically more fundamental than a Christian affirmation that Jesus is Lord as a way of meeting such a charge.[88] But what might such rational foundations look like? And what exactly brings us to believe they are compelling? At some point we must bow to the fact that our knowledge of God is given to us by the act of the Spirit as we listen obediently to a Word that comes

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87 By 'universal intent' Polanyi seeks to convey that the quest is for 'supra-personal' truth despite the fact that what we know is personal knowledge; we are committed, within a framework to that which we regard as impersonally given and this separates the responsible Polanyian truth-seeker from the subjectivist. See *Personal Knowledge*, pp.300ff, esp. 322-324.

88 We might recall at this point that Jesus often repudiated any challenge to ask for a higher authority or greater signs to authenticate his words and deeds - e.g. Mk. 8:11-12, Mt. 12:38-40, Lk. 20:1-8

not from ourselves but from God. The question of course is at what point? God is not bound in relating to His creation to some undergirding rational foundations; He is Lord of such foundations. Given this, a better model than axiomatic foundations which are built on remains that of a circular interaction; commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord is derived from personal participation in a community in which such statements are understood and embodied, through personal relationship to Christ through the Spirit (as mediated in Word, sacrament, others..), through ethical activities arising from such commitment and so on. But these dimensions to nurturing our participation also have ramifications for our understanding of Christ's lordship and for Christian life together in the service of God and others. To ask for epistemological foundations outside of this circle (commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord <-> church <-> Personal participation in Christ <-> commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord) is to remain outside the circle. Either we enter the circle or we do not; and for Bonhoeffer we enter that circle as we obey Christ.[89] Our participation in God is inseparable from that process by which we come to know God and that activity by which we carry out his purposes to be who we are meant to be; a fusion of two tasks which we saw earlier in the quite different context of Hegelian thought. Only as we enter this circle does it become possible for us to realise that we are participating in Christ. And even here the ambiguity that comes with personal relationships allowing space and freedom can mean that such a realisation is experienced only hesitantly, occasionally and fleetingly. But beyond the merely experiential awareness of our participation there is the epistemological assurance that comes with tried and tested personal commitment, and beyond even this there is a resting place in the epistemological assurance of the church.

On this account the reasonableness of Christian faith develops in and through commitment to Christian praxis. Such an approach shares similarities with Bernstein who recommends that *the* way of moving beyond objectivism and relativism "depends for its "reality and power" on dedicating ourselves to the *practical* task of furthering the type of solidarity, participation, and mutual recognition that is founded in dialogical communities"[90] J.Habermas complains

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89 "If you believe, take the first step, it leads to Jesus Christ. If you don't believe, take the first step all the same, for you are bidden to take it. No one wants to know about your faith or unbelief, your orders are to perform the act of obedience on the spot. Then you will find yourself in the situation where faith becomes possible and where faith exists in the true sense of the word." *The Cost of Discipleship,* pp.73-74.

90 R.J.Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p.231

of Bernstein that behind his argumentative strategy "there lies an absolutizing of the perspective of the participant which is complementary to Rorty's absolutizing of that of the observer".[91] However there is no such epistemological exclusivity[92] on our account, although there is the possibility of epistemological privileging through the kinds of Christ-centred, Spirit-motivated practices which are pneumatologically and Christologically genuine[93] derivative patterns of life and service. This should not seem so strange to Habermas. After all, Habermas appears to claim such epistemological privileging for that type of social interaction he terms 'communicative action'.[94] This epistemological approach carries within it a degree of openness and flexibility. But it is not the kind of openness Derrida advocates where we are constantly in flux, flitting from sign to sign in search of truth and meaning which is constantly beyond us as we are referred from cultural frame to cultural frame, from semiotic currency to semiotic currency, from purpose to purpose. Rather, as Thiselton argues drawing on Pannenberg, Moltmann and Wittgenstein amongst others, there is an 'open future' pointing to an unfulfilled hitherto 'not yet' rooted in God's promises and in continuity with the history of Israel and Jesus Christ. Further, as we commit ourselves to God and God's promises in this future, we also realise self-transformation and self-knowledge, our practice involving the reconstitution of self-identity

> ..as no longer the passive victim of forces of the past which 'situated' it within a network of pre-given roles and performances, but opens out a new future in which new purpose brings a 'point' to its life. The self perceives its call and its value as one-who-is-loved within the larger narrative plot of God's loving purposes for the world, for society, and for the self.[95]

Such a transformation can be understood in terms of a conformation of the way

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91 See his 'Questions and Counterquestions' in *Habermas and Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p.196

92 What Habermas was particularly nervous of was the alarming way in which modern society has shown such ruthless selectivity in its use of processes of rationalization. Purposive-rational rationalization has prevailed, that monological, teleological, goal-oriented rationality which could lead to 'pathologies of modernity' (such as the Nazi horror) if not balanced with other rationalizations such as 'communicative rationalization' - involving actions oriented towards understanding, mutuality and consensual action rather than the goals of efficiency and success. For an excellent introduction to this aspect of Habermas' work see R.J.Bernstein's *The New Constellation* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), esp. pp.199-230.

93 While detailed criteria for such genuineness are to be avoided lest legalism result, certain markers in the Christian tradition provide useful checks. Fruits of the Spirit, loving others as oneself, communal inclusivity and humility are examples.

94 See e.g. R.J.Bernstein, *Objectivism and Relativism*, p.185

95 A.Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self*, p.160

of our being to the what of our being in Christ, an epistemological-ontological transformation describing participation in God.

How do we know if we are dealing with God or delusion in all of this? We do not necessarily. However a number of points can be made. First, pre-judgements are required if understanding is to be reached.[96] Theistic prejudgements entail a prior commitment to theism and such prejudgements are open to scrutiny in the light of consequential understanding. For example the self-transformation resulting from commitment suggested above may provide confirmation that certain states of affairs (such as the Lordship of Christ) are the case. It is arguable further that Christian prejudgements carry within them the notion of hermeneutical suspicion concerning the potentially self-serving, manipulative, deluded motivations of such assumptions. Second, foreclosing unrealised possibilities beyond one's horizon as unreality engenders a self-fulfilling philosophy of imprisonment. Risky acts of trust and provisional commitments may lead to "the discovery of patterns of promise and fulfilment which seldom exhaustively match expectations, but instantiate both continuity and room for novelty".[97] Third, *if* encountering others and Otherness is a real possibility (see next chapter on this), then Schelling's insight that a fundamental element of self-consciousness is the awareness of a contrast between Self and Other suggests that there may be value (in terms of self-knowledge) in pursuing relationship to an undergirding, transcending Other.[98]

Some of the most interesting contemporary epistemological discussions focus on a 'third' way of going beyond epistemological objectivism and relativism (e.g. Bernstein, MacIntyre), both of which have been shown to face serious criticisms. We have located our own thoughts within this third way and would argue tentatively that our understanding of participation coheres with such an epistemology, indicating some theological possibilities of such a third way.[99]

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96 "..prejudgements and prejudices have a threefold temporal character: they are handed down to us through tradition; they are constitutive of what we are now (and are in the process of becoming); and they are anticipatory - always open to future testing and transformation". R.J.Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, pp.140-141.

97 A.Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self*, p.161

98 Hans-Georg Gadamer stands squarely in this tradition when he states that "only through others do we gain true knowledge of ourselves". See his 'The Problem of Historical Consciousness', in *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*, eds. P.Rabinow and W.M.Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p.107

99 See T.Hart's *Faith Thinking. The Dynamics of Christian Theology* (London: SPCK, 1995) for a good introduction to this approach as applied to theology in general.

This third way seeks to retain a sense of personal relationship, trusting commitment and spatio-temporal room for human and divine freedom which objectivism could not offer. It also seeks to retain a critical purchase on truth-claims[100] , God's coherency and transcendence in a manner unavailable to relativism. Our approach also seeks to provide the possibility of overcoming the dangers of divorcing faith and action, separating the individual and the community which come with a subjectivist interpretation of the "inner testimony of the Spirit". The inner testimony of the Spirit is simply one aspect of an wholistic participation which is embedded in an ecclesial life and personal obedience to Christ. Knowledge of our participation in Christ is in part an awareness of our abiding in Christ, but this abiding is nurtured only as it is exercised in all aspects of our lives (ecclesial, ethical, social...). Knowledge by acquaintance is primary here, although 'knowledge about' is a vital component of such knowledge. We cannot expect to come by this 'knowledge by acquaintance' except by way of allowing Christ to take form in us. And this entails personal commitment, not mere intellectual appreciation.

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100 We agree with A. MacIntyre in rejecting the idea that incommensurability between traditions entails giving up the universality of truth claims made within a given tradition. See his *Whose Justice, Which Rationality* (London: Duckworth, 1988), esp pp.349-369

6. PARTICIPATION AND OTHERNESS

The mode of our participation in Christ still requires some filling out. We have spoken quite broadly of how participation in Christ involves obedience to Him as the Spirit communicates the Word to us, in worship, word and ethical action, but we must attend more closely to the ways in which our participation in Christ is enabled and realised, and in particular to the place of sacramental participation in Christ. It also remains for us to examine in detail how it is that participation avoids infringing God's transcendent otherness, an infringement which we saw Hegelian thought was guilty of and which is an ever-present danger where the notion of participation is insufficiently well-defined. How can we speak of participation in God without losing those creaturely limits which define us as creatures and not Creator, without creating an overarching ontology to which both Creator and creatures are subject, without leaving the world behind and without losing all continuity with all that has been? These are some of the questions that inevitably arise when we confront the issue of participation with an understanding of God's Otherness to the fore. We shall address such questions in this chapter as they arise in our conversations with a number of theologians for whom Otherness and/or conceptions of participation have been leitmotifs.

6.1 Kierkegaard: Otherness and the Paradox of Faith

According to Kierkegaard there is an absolute qualitative difference between human beings and God, a difference making a love-relationship between the parties difficult to conceive by analogy to human love-relationships because the latter involve human beings who "stand essentially on the same level, and the differences between them are accidental"[1]. Kierkegaard suggests that the principle of equality in love can only express itself in the relationship between God and human beings by means of the absolute difference, the form this takes being humility, "the humility that frankly admits its human lowliness with humble cheerfulness before God, trusting that God knows all this better than himself"[2]. One practical upshot of this humility is the suffering of true religiosity, a suffering

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1 S.Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (hereafter CUP), tr. D.F.Swenson and W.Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p.439

2 Ibid., p.440

which is rooted in being

..related to God in an absolutely decisive manner, and to be unable to find any decisive external expression for this... This inability is rooted in the necessary relativity of the most decisive of external expression, in its being both too much and too little; it is too much because it involves a certain presumptuousness over against other men, and it is too little because it is after all a worldly expression[3] .

Already from this we can see how difficult it is for Kierkegaard to fill out a rightly-ordered relationship between God and human beings with any particular content from the human side beyond an awareness of the inadequacy of our supposedly God-directed expressions, and this is precisely because of the way in which Kierkegaard conceives the absolute qualitative difference between human beings and God.

It is almost as if the chasm between the divine and the human is so great that we are left focusing in awe on the immensity of the gulf between God and humanity rather than focusing on the Godhead. One might expect that the various bipolarities that come together in Kierkegaard's thought would bolster the idea of difference, bipolarities of eternity and temporality, of truths of reason and truths of fact, of infinity and finitude. But in fact Kierkegaard sees the human self as a"synthesis of infinity and finitude, the temporal and the eternal, freedom and necessity ..." [4]. The human self is, for Kierkegaard, the union of psychic and somatic elements effected by self-consciousness, a union by which the psycho-physical synthesis transcends itself as nature and asserts itself as spirit. The self as spirit is the natural synthesis of body and soul become conscious of itself and free with respect to itself. Freedom (or self-consciousness, the terms seem finally synonymous in Kierkegaard as Mackey notes[5]), cannot be defined, derived or demonstrated by a study of human nature, for definition, derivation and demonstration are equivalent to determination, and a freedom determined by nature is a contradiction in terms. Such freedom is also a source of anxiety, an anxiety related to 'something that is nothing', which represents "freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility"[6]. Kierkegaard suggests that every

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[3] Ibid., p.440

[4] S.Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* (hereafter SD), tr. H.V. and E.H.Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p146.

[5] L.Mackey, *Kierkegaard: a kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: Uni. of Pennsylvania, 1971), p.135

[6] S.Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, tr. A.Thomte and A.B.Anderson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 42-43

individual is aware of a tension between his current conception of who he is and the presence of alternatives that are in some sense available to him; indeed for Kierkegaard there is not a living being who "does not secretly harbour an unrest, an inner strife, a disharmony, ... an anxiety about some possibility in existence or an anxiety about himself"[7]. Such anxiety does not only reflect the possibility of sin however, but also prefigures a recognition of the fact that the realisation of one's true identity as an individual self lies in one's relating, not to earthly or temporal realities which can deflect one from one's proper goal, but to the eternal, the divine:

> Rightly understood, human existence takes the form of a 'constant striving', seeking a fulfilment that lies beyond the temporal sphere and which is attainable only by our freely committing ourselves to a power that transcends objective knowledge and rational comprehension; in so 'willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it'[8].

This analysis suggests that faith rather than sin might issue from a response to anxiety, depending on how we exercise our freedom. So our freedom is the possibility of our relation to the eternal, eternity holding the place of the future for existing human beings[9]. Individual existence is perfected in proportion to a person's unique perspective on, and sharing in, God's eternal being. But this being must be sought after, and this participation must be gained through free acts, having temporal duration and being subject to temporal risks and temptations. (Thus time and eternity conspire to give freedom its mystery and depth.)

There is a strong sense here of becoming that which we potentially are, a sense of transcending the purely natural, finite and contingent. Not that this degenerates into some Platonic flight from the world or crude deification because Kierkegaard is careful to flag up the fact that the human being is

> ..a synthesis of infinity and finitude, the temporal and the eternal, freedom and necessity. In short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two. So regarded man is not yet a self.[10]

As Mackey puts it, for Kierkegaard if we try to understand man as he is, we fail

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[7] SD, p.22
[8] SD, p.49
[9] CUP, p.271
[10] SD, p.146

because man is not;

immediately man is nothing but a lack (of a given self), a prospect (of acquiring himself as spirit), and a friction (between nature and freedom as the conditions of spiritual selfhood)... The force of Kierkegaard's paradoxes is to define human nature by pointing up the impossibility of defining it 11.

For Kierkegaard transcendence does not lead away from actuality in its human mode but gives a new meaning to what is concrete, temporal and contingent. It does this by confessing the presence of the eternal being in the fullness of time and as Maluntschuk points out, for Kierkegaard the human being encounters "the eternal as the transcendent outside himself and also as the eternal within himself"[12] . As we grow in relation to God, so we grow in relation to ourselves, and the movement towards the transcendent and toward the eternal within together form the movement of faith.

If we ask how we are to go about this transcending whereby we realise our synthesised selves, our relationship to our eternal self and God, we begin to see the difficulties Kierkegaard has in overcoming the infinite qualitative difference of God and human beings in terms of relating them. Eternity is not some goal for Kierkegaard, but rather that which "is able to exist and to be grasped within every change"[13]. The eternal defies objectification and Kierkegaard, in his search for that which is changeless in the human being, concludes that it is only purity in heart which provides the perspective of eternity in man's doing and deciding;

this consciousness (of considering one's life before God) is the fundamental condition for truthfully willing only one thing. For he who is not himself a unity is never really anything wholly and decisively... For after all, what is eternity's accounting other than that the voice of conscience is forever installed with its eternal right to be the exclusive voice.[14]

As Sutherland puts it

the one thing which we must will is the perspective of eternity on these (e.g. wisdom, foolishness, talents, wealth) and, of course, the perspective of eternity is not a vantage point (goal) to be

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11 L.Mackey, *Kierkegaard*, p.137

12 Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p.310

13 S.Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*, tr. W.Lowrie (London: Collins, 1966), p.36

14 Ibid., p.184

achieved., it is a manner of living realised only in the appropriation of it[15].

But if we press Kierkegaard to show us how, more concretely, we might exercise our freedom to embrace our God and the selves we really are we find Kierkegaard to be a poor guide. "Be pure in heart", "will one thing", but will *what*, and be pure in heart with respect to what? We have here form without content, unless we are simply to follow the voice of conscience and the path of Kierkegaardian inwardness. Kierkegaard writes that "only when the individual turns to his inner self, and hence only in the inwardness of self-activity, does he have his attention roused, and is enabled to see God."[16] Not only is such a path dangerously individualistic in being open to self-delusion, but it suggests that relationship to God is absolutely non-social, having little reference to our neighbour. Latterly Kierkegaard began to redress this imbalance, seeing that love of neighbour was rooted in the love of God, but Kierkegaard's fear of autonomous, apotheosized social organisms may have prevented him from accepting the visible and corporate forms which it could be argued the 'I-Thou' relationship assumes at the level of human community[17]. His lack of an ecclesiology is consistent with his view of a God who is found inwardly, but it is also suggestive of a God unconcerned with the fabric of relationships and community-life in this world, a God busy forging individual relationships with believers which will find completion in eternity. Kierkegaard's understanding of the individual in his particularity needs tempering with a deeper exploration of the individual in his relationality. The very foundations of our conscience, our freedom and our self-consciousness are informed by (and inform) our relationships to others and God. As such, we cannot consider the 'inwardness of self-activity' in isolation from our relationships. Kierkegaard is surely right to defend the particularity of the temporal individual, a particularity whose significance and eternal possibility was revealed in the incarnation. But particularity lies not in isolation or privacy, but is constituted by and in relationships.

But while Kierkegaard's approach lacks enough of a sense of particularity in relationship, he does point the way to an understanding of transcendence, of

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15 S.Sutherland, *Faith and Ambiguity* (London: SCM, 1984), p.73

16 CUP, p.218

17 See J.Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1953), p.293, n.21

relating to otherness, which calls us neither to escape our temporal shells with some eternal essence and be reunited to the eternal God, nor to deny that which is other and simply to lose ourselves in our own depths. How is it that the Kierkegaardian approaches God's Otherness? Only it would seem by becoming aware of one's sinfulness and impotence before God, a situation in which faith is possible. Collins notes that it is the Incarnation which

> ..respects the proper reality of both eternity and temporal existence, transcendence and immanence. Yet it also removes from the absolute its aloofness and impersonality, and from the finite its incapacity to present man with a substance of enduring happiness. This substance is given to us in faith, which is man's supreme inward act of free dedication to the good and the holy. The subject matter of faith is nothing other than the most pregnant form of actuality; the temporal coming of the Son of God in the flesh. Kierkegaard is led to refer to Christ unqualifiedly as "the existential", meaning thereby that, in His person, time and eternity are freely joined in all their strong contrasts and their demands upon human intelligence and will[18].

And it is faith that enables our relationship with God rather than reason because reason inevitably conceives God in its own image and likeness; Reason "cannot absolutely transcend itself, and hence conceives only such a superiority over itself as it can conceive by means of itself"[19]. Kierkegaard goes as far as suggesting that faith is opposed to reason, that one must believe *against* the understanding, and that this is especially true of the incarnation; "that which in accordance with its nature is eternal comes into existence in time, is born, grows up, and dies - this is a breach with all thinking"[20]. And how is such faith established? In *Philosophical Fragments* (hereafter PF) we find an emphasis on the enabling condition for faith, some kind of inner transformation through the miraculous power of divine grace. In CUP however, where the main concern is said to be with what it means to become a Christian, the emphasis is almost exclusively upon the stance adopted by the human subject. Faith here presupposes 'inwardness' as a fundamental condition. By inwardness Kierkegaard did not mean introspective reflection - which would be to come close to an observational outlook Kierkegaard associated with objectivity. Rather,

> it manifests itself in self-commitment and the spirit in which such commitment is undertaken; a person exhibits inwardness through the resolutions he forms, the sincerity with which he identifies them, and the degree to which they govern his approach to the situations that confront him.[21]

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18 Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard*, p.165

19 S.Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, tr. D.F.Swenson, rev. H.V.Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p.55

20 CUP, p.513

Inwardness is a clue to seeing how revelation is possible for Kierkegaard. There is no 'direct' revelation for Kierkegaard, indeed the true God cannot become directly recognisable; "Direct recognizableness is what the merely human, what the men to whom he came, would pray for as an indescribable relief"[22]. Kierkegaard's famous parable of the king and the humble maiden in PF elaborates on his understanding of revelation, but this still leaves open the question of how the eye of faith penetrates to the hidden revelation. Perhaps it is only through inwardness for "in his relation to an eternal happiness the individual has to do solely with himself in inwardness"[23]. Such inwardness is personal, private and loses something in being communicated, for "inwardness cannot be directly communicated, for its direct expression is precisely externality, its direction being outward, not inward" [24]. As such Kierkegaard is appropriately vague about inwardness in his writings. We may see symptoms of inwardness in sincerity, commitment and intensity of zeal, but to attempt to express, define or comprehend inwardness may be to empty it of its essence. If it is through inwardness that we come to recognise ourselves and God, this route is shrouded in mystery, and open only to the individual exister in isolation. Such a view has caused some theologians (such as Barth, C.D. IV.1, p.689) to criticise Kierkegaard for his personal and private understanding of the Christian experience.

Kierkegaard's thought announces some of the major themes concerning Otherness; the qualitative difference assumed of that which is other, the problems in assuming that reason can span the gulf and the difficulties in articulating difference without reducing it to the same. Transcendence is another key theme. We are called to go beyond ourselves and Kierkegaard seems to suggest that perhaps the most we can do in this process of ourselves is to remove the blockages (of sin) we put in the way of God's work. Dying to immediacy is one way, but this is not to be taken as dying to temporality because it is precisely in the mode of the temporal that God meets us. The temporal is the context of God's movement towards us, and we 'become' as we participate in this conjoining of time and eternity, so becoming more our particular selves and more acutely aware of God's relationship to us.

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22 S.Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, tr. W.Lowrie (London: OUP, 1941), p.137

23 CUP, p.346

24 CUP, p.232

Kierkegaard's thought raises the question of the *way* of this transcendence but his (finally) elusive and purposefully ambiguous hints concerning the manner of our becoming may with some justification be regarded as insufficient guides to understanding our participation in God.[25]

6.2 Barth: The Grace of Participation

One of the interesting questions arising from all of this is how Kierkegaard is able to understand the difference between God and human beings because it might be argued that this would presume a perspective on both human beings and that which is absolutely other than human beings, God. Such a perspective is impossible for reason according to Kierkegaard and for him it can only be faith which gives some indication of the difference. Kierkegaard locates the principal difference as being in our sinfulness, because human beings derive sin from themselves and their own activity. Collins suggests that

> ..unfortunately he (Kierkegaard) locates this difference in something other than the very perfection which founds their likeness... This leaves two things unexplained; how the rest of the created order is distinguished from God, and how the divine mode of being is set off from that aspect of a human being which is perfect, in a natural or supernatural way. A metaphysical theory of participated being would begin by pointing out that, by *deriving* its being from God, the temporal existent is unlike God, even in the respect in which they are alike"[26].

Collins is right to flag up the human creature's dependence and derived nature as an important difference between creature and Creator, but there is a sense in which this goes hand in hand with an awareness of distance from God through sinfulness, sinfulness showing itself as the assertion and assumption of independence, from which selfishness, irresponsibility, pride etc. arise. Awareness of our sinfulness may be the beginning of our response to God, a response which simultaneously realises culpability, relationship, dependence and responsibility, as well as forgiveness and the offer of new life.

Kierkegaard sees faith as the point at which contact is established but we have

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25 E.Farley seeks to go beyond Kierkegaard's thought by appealing to an experienced phenomenon over and against Kierkegaard's recognition of the impossibility of faith for an egocentric subjectivity whose only passion is itself. He claims "we experience a passion for life which is not merely on behalf of the self or on behalf of others. And with that we experience resistance to death, to dullness, to meaninglessness on behalf of something larger than the self". See his *Good & Evil*, pp.181-182

26 Collins, *The Mind of Kierkegaard*, p.151

seen that there is a certain ambivalence about the derivation of this faith in Kierkegaard's writings; is it a human work or a divine gift? Perhaps Kierkegaard is again being purposefully ambiguous, implicitly drawing attention to the paradoxical nature of faith which can be simultaneously experienced as having been received and yet as that which we nurture in ourselves. But for some theologians insurmountable problems arise if we maintain that faith is in any sense our work. Karl Barth for example, following Calvin, interpreted God's utter otherness as His inalienable subjectivity in His revelation. This being the case, faith is not about our building a way to God but about God condescending to come to us, and speaking of God really means letting God speak. Barth understands the infinite qualitative difference in terms of the *finitum non capax infiniti* primarily, that is humanity's incapacity for revelation. But while human beings are incapable of spanning the gulf between themselves and God, God mercifully bridges the divide by creating faith in human beings, revelation creating of itself the necessary point of contact with human beings. Such faith never becomes our possession as if we have the gift of faith to dispose of as we will (and with it the relation to the Other); rather, as S.Smith notes,

> it (faith) is loaned to him (man) exclusively for use. Epistemically as well as practically, man is allowed to enter only that "synergism" that advances God's will alone, based on a correct relationship of Creator and creature: as servants and witnesses, but precisely thus, as human, we have contact with God... The claim to Christian knowledge is justified by the event of God's self-giving, not by "even the most weighty stipulations" offered in advance of the event... The assurance proper to faith is not one of cognitive possession but of hope, hungering and thirsting.[27]

Consequently Christian 'experience' for Barth is a contingent, decisional event where the primary note is one of acknowledgement, of being led, of "letting oneself be continually led, always making a step, always being in movement from the experience felt at one time or the thought grasped at one time to the opposite experience and thought" (C.D. I.1, p.207). Such experience, or really "not experience but more than experience" (p.208).[28] shows that the *finitum non capax infiniti* is not the last word. It would seem from this that the Other achieves that which is impossible, and its very Otherness is appreciated in its

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[27] S.Smith, *The Argument to the Other* (Chico CA: Scolars Press, 1983), pp.156-157

[28] Smith rightly points out that for Barth it is inappropriate to set up any experience per se as the proprium of Christian theology: "For where within experience will be found the criterion by which to distinguish the valid from the invalid, divine from human? That is why Christian experience is "more than experience"; like the church, it is not alone, not referred back to itself. The infinite Word of God eternally exceeds and masters this experience. It is axiomatic for Barth that our experiences and concepts in themselves express our resistance to God" Ibid., p.158

not being imprisoned in the realm of the possible. And against the argument that relationship with such an Other can not be instituted without some antecedent frame of reference, without some prior epistemological assumptions, Barth argues that the gesture that exceeds the Same, instituting relationship with the Other as Other is the spoken Word, language heard; "the imperative chains and binds us because, invading us through the ears, it cannot be intercepted and filtered through our ideas of what can happen and what can be demanded".[29] One of the reasons why this aural model provides a promising approach is because it appears to retain both human and divine freedom, persons being present to one another but not coercing one another. Barth himself claims that

> ..the grace of revelation is not conditioned by his (man's) humanity, but his humanity is conditioned by the grace of revelation. God's freedom does not compete with man's freedom. How could it be the freedom of the divine mercy bestowed on man, if it suppressed and dissolved human freedom? It is the grace of revelation that God exercises and maintains His freedom to free man (C.D. I.2, p.365).

But Barth cautions against an understanding of relationship with the Other which somehow thematises the Other, or the assumption of a language which adequately captures the Other in a way which reduces the transcendence of the Other. If we are tempted to frame the Other in our language, in definitive, coherent, logical and non-contradictory ways conforming to the *rules* of language and the *canons of reason,* we have already lost that acknowledgement of the Other's transcendence and priority; it is the Other who provides the justification for the rules and canons of reason we set up, not vice versa. For Barth we can only evoke the reasonableness of faith by obediently committing ourselves, just as we can only learn to swim once we are in the water.

Where the Other has spoken to us, where the gulf between Creator and creatures has been spanned, is in the highly concrete givenness of Christ for Barth, and to those who would question the Incarnation in terms of its particularity, conceptual coherence or rationality Barth would presumably respond by suggesting that their speaking of so-called *appropriate* forms of transcendence shows that they are still not listening to God but only to themselves. Reason, or theological reason, arises then as the comparison of the authoritative witness to Revelation in scripture with the church's

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[29] S.Smith, ibid., p.208.

proclamation. The mystery is of course that not many seem to hear God's Word as spoken in the Incarnation, not many appear to respond to the approach of the Other. Perhaps some have heard but pretend that they have not, perhaps some reject such an approach and seek to justify themselves, but whatever the reason, Barth is driven to say it is the scandal of sin. If however the approach of the Other is attended to, then one can attend properly to the others around one; the awareness that God has spoken and that God has acted has implications for Christian ethics because we discover the meaning of the other person in the light of such speaking and acting;

> What is the meaning of "conscience" in Christian ethics? Very simply it means that we may know what God has done for us. And we may therefore also know about ourselves, and know about ourselves as God knows about us, so choose and determine ourselves and our acts as God has chosen and determined us. Good or evil action is simply being obedient or disobedient to this knowledge of ours about God and ourselves.[30]

6.3 God's Sovereign Freedom and our Response-ability

Well-rehearsed criticisms of Barth's approach include the accusations that the Other overrides our freedom in making contact with us[31] (arbitrarily establishing faith in some and not in others) and the apparent passivity of human beings in responding to God, so that it seems that when God calls to us, it is God who answers from our human hearts (e.g. C.D. I.2, pp.271-272). (We should note here that Barth does not clearly distinguish between the formal freedom of choice and the freedom of proper fulfilment: when Christ is described by Barth as the only subject who is truly 'free', the freedom described is that of proper fulfilment, not freedom of choice.) It may well be that a larger problem here is Barth's conception of the relation of nature and grace[32] and the way in which

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30 K.Barth, 'Christliche Ethik' in 'Zwei Vortrage', *Theologische Existenz Heute*, n.F. No. 3 (1946), p.6 (89f.)

31 See for example N.Biggar's *The Hastening That Waits*, p.162

32 The nature/grace debate in the West has often underemphasised God's *relationship* to creation in originating (creation), sustaining and bringing all things to completion in Himself. We are created and elected as beings related to God and in that relationship our existence and possibilities together reside. If the focus of our *being and becoming* is God's relationship with us (in Christ) and our relationship with Him (in Christ) then the image of covering us with grace or providing us with 'substantial' gifts above and beyond our natural status and abilities fades away. (And we saw earlier how Calvin's focus on relatedness to the *person* of Christ helped here). Participation as a notion must not subvert the conjoining of our being and becoming in our relationship with God by being considered simply as the process of sanctification independent of justification, or by being considered as a metaphor for the implantation of grace into our natural state. Our participation must cover both justification and sanctification, both our createdness and teleological goal if problems associated with the nature/grace debate are to be circumvented. (And this is so because only a relationship to God in the person of Christ can prevent grace from becoming something external to our being, or tear it away from the person of Christ.)

all reality derives from the Word of God. Even so, while at times "it does seem that Barth is trying to derive a complete description of reality from the Word of God, at other times he seems to be engaged in the more modest project of articulating a vision of the theological environment in which empirically perceived reality is set".[33] Interestingly Barth's understanding of 'participation' tends to develop the latter line of thought. In C.D. IV.1 where Barth focuses on the Doctrine of Reconciliation he writes of the opportunity of salvation as "the expectation of being in perfection in participation (*Teilnahme*) in the divine being" (C.D. IV.1, p.8). Not that having a "part in the being of God" implies a creature assumes some form of divinised being but "a being which is hidden in God, and in that sense (distinct from God and secondary) eternal being" (C.D. IV.1, p.8). Further,

> Since salvation is not proper to created being as such, it can only come to it, and since it consists in participation in the being of God it can come only from God. The coming of this salvation is the grace of God - using the word in its narrower and most proper sense (C.D. IV.1, p.8).

It is for this purpose that God creates, preserves and over-rules the human being, "that there may be a being distinct from Himself ordained for salvation, for perfect being, for participation in His own being, because as the One who loves in freedom He has determined to exercise redemptive grace - and that there may be an object of this His redemptive grace, a partner to receive it" (C.D. IV.1, p.9-10). Our refusal to be such partners, our opposition to salvation and our aiming at another salvation supposedly found in the sphere of our own creaturely being by our own effort jeopardises our creaturely being and reveals our sin and misery. Yet at this point God intervenes for us, becoming the human partner in our place in Christ. And this is not simply the restoration of the *status quo ante*, but is "His participation in our being, life and activity and therefore obviously our participation in His; and therefore it is nothing more nor less than the coming of salvation itself, the presence of the *eschaton* in all its fullness" (C.D. IV.1, p.13). This does not leave us without responsibility or as mere spectators according to Barth but "awakens" us, "sets us in motion" and "actualises" the "one true possibility of our own being"; we are to "affirm" the establishment of our true humanity;

> to be thankful for it, to accept the promise and the command which it contains, to exist as the community, and responsibly in the community, of those who know that this is all that remains to us, but that it does remain to us and that for all men everything depends upon its coming to pass. And it is this "We with God" that is meant by the Christian message in its central "God with us", .. i.e. our participation in His being (C.D. IV.1, p.15).

[33] N.Biggar, Book Review in *SJT* Vol. 47, No. 4 (1994), p.542.

We can see here a strong ontological realism about the new creations we actually are, a sense in which our response needs to be one of acknowledgement of what we have become through Christ. Participation in this sense is about conformation to what we really now are. 'Become what you are' means 'Grow into your character, accept the outline of your particular form of life...' (C.D. III.4, p.388). We are to take up humanity's relationship to God in Christ which we realise exists as we look to Christ, and participation is about relating ourselves to God in Christ, becoming those human beings who are for God (and for one another) as we appreciate from Christ that our true humanity is a being for God (and for one another).

This understanding is complemented by Barth's earlier comments on participation in C.D. II.1 where our human knowledge of God is the focus of our participation;

> .. the veracity of our human knowledge of God, consists in the fact that our viewing and conceiving is adopted and determined to participation in the truth of God by God Himself in grace (C.D. II.1, p.179).

Given that there is bestowed upon our viewing, conceiving and speaking a similarity with the object of our knowledge and that the divine veracity is adapted to us, our participation is primarily a relationship of thanks. Barth takes care here both to stress how we remain within our human capacities and yet in this very sphere of human capacity witness to what transcends our possibilities: in this *exuberance* "human knowledge of God is an act of gratitude and therefore partakes of the veracity of the revelation of God" (C.D. II.1, p.219). Further, the consciousness of our inadequacy to partake of the knowledge of God and our awareness of such participation makes for *awe* (cf. C.D. II.1, p.223).

To argue that our words and concepts are entirely inappropriate to grasp God and that as such we cannot participate in the knowledge of God is, according to Barth, not to understand our thought and language as God's creation (cf. C.D. II.1, p.229). But even if the separation between Creator and creatures is overcome by God, it is not the case that there is no longer any hiddenness about God; to assume so is immediately to assume that our knowledge of God

is not due to the grace of His revelation; "each step that we take as we come from the hiddenness of God must, and will, consist in a new reception of the grace of revelation" (C.D. II.1, p.235). Further, God is gracious "not only in His unveiling, but also in His veiling; not only in His pardoning and sanctifying Yes but also in His No of judgment upon our work" (C.D. II.1, p.236).

6.4 The Christological Ground of Participation

At this point the Christological centre of Barth's thought becomes evident. It is Christ alone who participates in our humanity and who for Barth enables us to participate in God. This requires some explanation. Barth readily grounds the relation of the human Jesus to the Father in the Trinitarian relation of the Son to the Father, and he draws analogies between our relation to Christ and the Son's relation to the Father; "He (Christ) then knows us, and we know Him, as the Father knows Him and He the Father" (C.D. II.2, p.780). This grounding of relations in the Trinitarian relations is perhaps at once the most promising and complex of paths by which to understand our participation in God. And this 'acting out' is, in one movement, both the descending humility of the eternal Son and the ascending humanity of Jesus for Barth (e.g. C.D. IV.2, p.24). Our participation pivots on the incarnation because it is precisely here that we also begin, at least from a noetic standpoint, to participate, as human beings, in God's power and glory - epistemologically the divine act which is the presence of the incarnate Word is an open, participable event in which Christ can initiate human knowing into the very act of his incarnation;

> the essence of the knowledge of this One is that the divine act of majesty in and by and from which the man Jesus has His being should be reflected and repeated in the human seeing and interpreting which is awakened and controlled by Him and therefore corresponds to Him (C.D. IV.2, p.39).

The thrust for Barth is on things actually taking place, our being drawn in to the life-transforming event of Jesus Christ, as Christ installs us in a new and deeper sharing of the acts of his own life. And this means no change in nature for human beings, but rather involves us in reflecting Christ's own human being, acting and knowing in the mode of the divine act, a being, acting and knowing illuminated by the divine act's 'own quality'. At times Barth suggests that our telos is a relationship in which the Father's relation to the Son is *repeated* in us;

"He (Jesus) gives us his Holy Spirit in order that his own relationship to his Father may be repeated in us" (C.D. II.2, p.780). However it should be stressed that our telos depends upon Christ in that the basis of our teleological becoming is that qualitatively different person Jesus Christ who both embodies what we are to become and mediates God to us; Christ is not jettisoned when we reach our telos through him because we are dependent for eternity on the sustaining grace of God which is mediated through Christ. It is of significance that Barth uses the term 'participation' in this context, the word stressing the dependent nature of our telos;

> We emphasise again that there can be no question of there being simply and directly that which Jesus is alone. They are not simply and directly covenant-partners of God as His creatures; they are destined to become this. And this means concretely that they are destined to participate in the benefits of the fellow-humanity of that One, to be delivered by Him" (C.D. III.2, p.225).

Our participation in God appears to be two-tiered for Barth; there is an underlying passivity where our relationship with the totally Other and our humanity is established, and an overlying activity which is both acknowledgement and affirmation of this established relationship and humanity. It might be argued that our participation is constantly in need of re-establishment for Barth, that the event-like nature of revelation suggests an occasionalism which is implicit in his notion of participation and that participation needs to start over and over again.[34] Such an argument should not lead us to view God's commitment as at best occasional however. Our participation is in one sense not occasional because of our being elected by God in Christ, an election which entails God's commitment to us and the basis on which God reveals Himself to us and the foundation of our participation. Our participation is not so much a sharing in terms of being or having as it is a participation in God's purposes for us in Christ, which begins with our election by God in the person of Jesus Christ. This election is not an election following on from our being created but is implicit in and the purpose of our being created. The sustaining of creation in being can be regarded as a manifestation

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34 A.J.Torrance suggests that Barth failed to draw out sufficiently the Son's revealing the Father to a person as a personal communion beyond mere epistemic communication. For example Barth largely neglects doxological participation - that "gift of free participation in the glory of God or, more fully, the gift of participating by the Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father". Torrance emphasises the vicarious subjectivity of the Son in relation to the Father, in particular the (continuing) priesthood of Christ, a notion we have already mentioned in the context of Calvin's thought. See his *Persons in Communion*, p.225

of the ground God provides on which our (active) participation can be established, unfold or be realised. But there is a sense in which we are already participating in God as created, elected human beings.[35] This is perhaps not how Barth would want to put things because Barth might regard such an analysis as failing to give due emphasis to God's continual gracious *act* of upholding and nurturing human beings as covenant partners;

> we are not created the covenant-partners of God, but to be His covenant-partners, to be His partners in the history which is the goal of His creation and in which His work as Creator finds its continuation and fulfilment. That this is achieved... is a matter of the free grace with which God deals in sovereignty with His creature... We are created as mutual partners. And this leaves open the further possibility that we are created to be covenant-partners of God. And the content of the two statements makes it clear that the first is a reflection of the second, its truth being a likeness of that of the second (C.D. III.2, p.320).

6.5 Alteration

Some twentieth century philosophical approaches to the issue of intersubjectivity, personal identity and relationship with the Other can be instructive in fleshing out the process of 'becoming who we are' which plays such a role in Barth's theology and his understanding of participation. For example, Husserl's difficulties concerning establishing the reality of other minds result from starting with an autonomous, isolated subject. His understanding of intentionality (as the mind being directed towards objects) and his deduction that some kind of content in the mind accounted for this directedness led him to a starting-point as the intentional contents of his mind, self-evident content which could be the absolute and indubitable ground for everything else. The details of Husserl's theory need not detain us here[36], but what is clear is that the (human) other is reached by analogy with one's self and by empathy[37]. Not only does such an approach elevate the act of representation to being the paradigm of conscious life, so neglecting the historical, existential nature of consciousness, but it also stands in danger of not so much encountering the

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35 "The purpose and therefore the meaning of creation is to make possible the history of God's covenant with man which has its beginning, its centre and its culmination in Jesus Christ. The history of this covenant is as much the goal of creation as creation itself is the beginning of this history" (C.D. II.1, p.42).

36 See M.Theunissen, *The Other*, trans. C.Macann (London, MIT, 1984) p.81 for a brief overview.

37 Theunissen, ibid., p.71 Interestingly, as Edward Farley points out, "both Husserl and Max Scheler, the two dominant figures of early phenomenonological movement, ceased to give primacy to the knowing consciousness when they identified empathy as the basic act of human being-together". See his *Good and Evil*, p.38.

Other as other but assimilating otherness to the same.[38] A completely different approach is that of Martin Buber, who begins not by positing a transcendental ego but by suggesting that the "event" where others meet, where the I meets the Thou, is more original than those who are meeting each other. While it is true that at times Buber restricts himself to saying that the I becomes a "real self" in the meeting with the Thou, that an "individual" receives the mode of being of the person out of the between, nevertheless as Theunissen notes, "Buber's *fundamental* approach concedes to the between an absolutely creative power in that it precisely excludes this assumption"[39] (the assumption that I, for example, as an individual, am already what I am without the between). The trouble with this approach is that it is difficult to describe convincingly "the genesis of *perspectivity* out of the non-perspectival reality of the between. Since perspectivity is the essential component of the subjectively constituted world.."[40] validation of the thesis seems impossible. An approach which might take positive features from both Husserl's and Buber's thought would be one which stressed the nature of dialogical self-becoming (from Buber's I-Thou philosophy) together with the idea of alter-ation from Husserl's account. Alter-ation is about putting oneself in the position of the Other, in so far as one is able to 'make' oneself into the other. For Husserl, psychologically speaking this means "I not only feel myself into his (that is, the Other's) thinking, feeling, doing, but must follow him therein, his motives becoming my quasi motives. I have to '*go along with*' them in thought"[41]. Such an alter-ation involves a certain decentering, a disempowering. Such a dynamic can be distinguished from an Hegelian dynamic by asserting that the given particularity of the one who is alter-ating is not a transitory phenomenon lost in the ebb and flow of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, but the very essence which is teased out through the

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[38] E.Levinas was one who saw this danger in Husserl's thought, see S.Smith's *The Argument to the Other*, pp.83, 91. One who did not was Max Scheler whose extreme formulation of emotional participation led him to claim that "so far as concerns the act and its nature and the range of facts appearing within it, everyone can apprehend the experience of his fellow-men just as directly (or indirectly) as he can his own". See his *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. P.Heath (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), p.256. The positive aspect of this thought is that we are not so removed from the other that all we can immediately discern is a bodily veneer and external actions.

[39] M.Theunissen, *The Other*, p.366

[40] Theunissen, ibid., p.368

[41] E.Husserl, *Phanomenologie und die Fundamente der Wissenschaften*. Ed. W.Biemel (Hague:1952) p.275

process of alter-ating. This quest is not necessarily sinfully egotistical[42] or narrowly individualistic however because particularity is discovered to depend upon others and otherness which gives definition, limit and form to particularity. In terms of Christian relationships it could be argued that the second great commandment implies such a process of alter-ation. ("Dialogical" self-becoming is perhaps not the happiest phrase to use within a Christian context because it neglects that wider communal context of self and other-becoming which the church provides. Becoming here may depend on a wide range of 'dioratic' relationships, relationships open both to God and our neighbours.)

6.6 The Mode of Human Participation

Of interest here is Barth's understanding of the form of humanity as a "being in encounter" because Barth discusses ways of being intrinsic to human beings as human which in varying ways stress this process of alter-ation, deepening and broadening out the idea. Barth delineates four aspects to this being in encounter. First there is a seeing eye to eye, where we see others for who they are and allow others to see us, without deception, idealisation or derogation. Not to engage in such an eye to eye encounter is for Barth inhumanity.[43] The second aspect is that of 'mutual speech and hearing' (C.D. III.2, p.252). Just as we can look past people, so too we can talk past them and hear past them; an authentic human dialogue is one where "the spoken word becomes a means to seek and help the other in the difficulty which each entails for the other" and authentic human listening begins "only when the hearers are concerned about themselves, about the removal of their own difficulty in respect of the other, so that the words of the other are received and welcomed as a help in this embarrassment" (C.D. III.2, p.259). Thirdly "humanity consists in the fact that we need and are capable of mutual assistance" (p.262), and this is rooted in an awareness of our own limitations (so that we need the help of others) and in our awareness of the limitations and needs of others. Fourthly, our being in

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[42] Provided human beings' egocentricity is not exclusive but that which naturally arises from our space-time embodiedness and desire for well-being then it is not of itself necessarily sinful. Human beings may transcend their embodiment, their organic needs, immediate desires etc. without such embodiment, needs or desires being cancelled necessarily. Transcendence could be understood here as not so much the deformation as the transformation of human egocentricity.

[43] "The isolation in which we try to persist, the lack of participation which we show in relation to others and thus thrust upon others in relation to ourselves, is inhumanity" C.D. III.2, p.251.

encounter means that the three foregoing dimensions to being human are undertaken freely and with gladness. We must resist understanding human beings as able, from a point of neutrality, to choose "either for or against a willing participation in the Thou; either for or against an inner Yes as the motive of this participation" (p.267). Rather for Barth, "in his essence, his innermost being, his heart, he is only what he is gladly".[44] Barth's point could be reinforced with an understanding of human desire for relation itself, a being drawn to vulnerable, mysterious others without which the human being is impoverished. In this case the gladness of our being in encounter is in part the satisfaction of the desire to be with others in compassion.[45]

In all of this Barth is outlining the content of what it is to be human, the natural exercise and actualisation of human nature. But for the divine mercy embodied in Christ, human sinfulness would have prevented the authentic exercise of human freedom in loving and glad 'being in encounter'. This is the potency of Christian love, its distinction and relation to humanity, that it can make true and actual that which human beings cannot make true and actual of themselves, even though our natures are determined for it, "namely, a co-existence of man and fellow-man "gladly" fulfilled in freedom" (C.D. III.2, p.282). This Christian love is grounded in a noetic participation in Christ for Barth, a participation which sets aside our perverted relations, "in the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins, and in the summons to gratitude by the gracious gift of the Holy Ghost" (C.D. III.2, p.281). Barth thus understands Christian love as "the awakening and fulfilling of humanity, of the distorted and perverted but not forfeited manner of the natural man, i.e. of man as God created him" (C.D. III.2, p.284). Or to use the language of participation:

> only as love is shed abroad in our hearts as the love of God can humanity as the nature of man receive new honour and acquire a new stability. As it participates in love, it can and will never fail (C.D. III.2, p.276).

In terms of 'horizontal' and 'vertical' relations, it seems that our authentic freedom for one another and "being-in-encounter" gladly depend on a noetic

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[44] C.D. III.2, p.267.

[45] M.Nedoncelle claims that "the primordial drive of the self is not only an impulse toward the other and toward the value of the other, as Scheler so admirably showed; it is also an efficient energy that wants to contribute to the existence and development of the other." See his *Love and the Person*, trans. Sr. R.Adelaide (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), p.10

vertical participation as awareness of what Christ has done for us and who Christ is. While Barth acknowledges human goodness outside of Christianity, it is not clear whether he is able to make sense of such goodness given this requirement of noetic awareness for authentic freedom.

The "being in encounter" discussed by Barth goes beyond the concept of alteration mentioned earlier in that there is a greater stress on the mutuality and reciprocity implicit in being in encounter; as I become more me, you become more you, and it is *together* that we become more (or less) human. But even more significantly, the possibility of our becoming, our self-realisation, rests on God's movement towards humanity in Christ, in whom we see our possibilities as human beings. Barth notes that theological anthropology has a criterion - namely its knowledge of divine grace and the man Jesus - by which it can move towards a conception of the human being as being, at its deepest and highest level, a freedom of heart for the other. Such a conception is grounded in Christ's being from, to and with God the Father, a relation of a human being with God which shows humanity that it exists in a dependent relation to God, that it exists with God in that this relationship is maintained by God for the sake of humankind's salvation and deliverance, and that it exists for God in that we see our eternal destiny in Christ as being in communion with the Triune God. For Barth the clue to human being and relationships is found in the Triune relationships and the Christological relationship (of God with humankind and humankind with God in Christ), Barth pointing out that Jesus himself draws attention to the oneness of the Father and the Son and that unity of the disciples (Jn. 17:11, 22), the love the Father has for the Son and the love that the disciples might have (Jn. 17:26) etc. (cf. C.D. III.2, p.221)[46].

The four essential characteristics of "Being in Encounter" mentioned above are humanity's appropriate response to the revelation of Christ at the inter-human level, because in this way human beings participate in the history of the encounter and interaction of God with humanity in Jesus Christ and humankind images the Image of God, Jesus Christ.[47] This process is a process of becoming

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46 Even Barth accepts that there is a restricted Biblical warrant for validating such an analogy however; ".. we may refer to a narrow but sharply defined and therefore distinct line in St. John's Gospel" C.D. III.2, p.220.

47 "The humanity of Jesus is not merely the repetition and reflection of his divinity, or of God's controlling will; it is the repetition and reflection of God Himself, no more and no less. It is the image of God, the *imago Dei*"(C.D. III.2,p.219).

in which we become who we are called in Jesus Christ to be. Perhaps we can discern then what participation in the life of the Trinitarian God means for Barth. We do not become like God in any respect but rather always remain creatures totally dependent and in need of God. Even so there is a certain analogia relationis between the inner Trinitarian relations (e.g. of Father and Son) and the relation between God and human beings, an analogy we can infer from the relation of Jesus to the Father. The correspondence between the two relationships rests in the fact that the same divine freedom and love is exercised in both cases (cf. C.D. III.2, p.220). And in response, in the relation of Jesus to the Father we see a human being from, with and to God; in gratitude, exuberance and awe we respond in Christ to the God who is already for us, and in Jesus we see this embodied and this implies living for and serving the purposes of God by fulfilling his humanity and that of others. Jesus' being for others displays our human freedom to serve God willingly and actually fleshes out our freedom as our being for others rather than a being for ourselves apart from others. Thus our participation in the Triune life is a following of Christ which means concretely a participation in the knowledge of a God who is for us in Christ and a participation in Christ's being-for-others in the creaturely sphere. And this being-for-others extends to enabling others to come to acknowledge that God is for them, so sweeping them up into participation in the Triune life as they realise their election and respond by obeying and serving God in Christ.

6.7 Human Correspondence to the Trinitarian God

We might ask at this point whether Barth was sufficiently clear in his exposition of humanity as being in the image of God in terms of the analogia relationis. Does the analogy imply that our relationships with one another share a certain "similarity in dissimilarity" (C.D. III.2, p.324) with the *Trinitarian* relationships (in which case one might speak of a participation in the Triune life of God through 'horizontal' relationships), or does the analogy refer us rather to the covenantal relationship existing between God and ourselves? In his discussion of male-female relationships Barth appears to use both models; at times he argues against the idea of superiority and inferiority between men and women, yet Barth's reading of the N.T. (and in particular Paul) leads him to use terms such as superordination and subordination, all the while protesting that such terms

do not entail superior and inferior positions! Barth struggled to find terms expressive of 'equality' and distinction in relationship. This is pertinent to our discussion because if Barth is ambiguous about the nature of those horizontal relations which are expressive of our being for others (rooted in our being for God) and thus a participation in Christ, then there remains a deep ambiguity concerning the form of relationships indicative of participation. Issues such as this touch other deep concerns. For example should we treat the Trinitarian relationships as the theological grounds for defining human beings in terms of relationships of mutuality, community and ecstasis? One implication of this approach is that we move towards a Platonic view of participation in God; the Trinitarian God becomes merely a regulative ideal, *the* Form by which we live and in which we participate as our relations mirror those of the inner Trinitarian life; lost is all sense of the direct personal relation of God to ourselves and with it any hope for humanity. For all Barth's ambiguity he is rightly struggling to avoid such dangers by linking God's inner Trinitarian life with human life through God's external relationships, and for Barth this means God's covenantal relationships. Where Barth is to be followed is in his vision that it is God's love and freedom which provide the basis of the analogia relationis. In this case the image of God is in part our freedom to love and our being creatures who love freely, a love directed towards God and our neighbour, a love similar in respects but dissimilar in other respects to God's love, a love grounded in God's love.

Barth's thought provides an interesting understanding of our *correspondence* to God's faithfulness and action, God's freedom and love, an understanding which can help to fill out what it is we mean when speaking of participation in God. Right responsiveness to God's downward movement in Jesus Christ includes a correspondent obedience of humility (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9), which however "will always be a profoundly imperfect correspondence, (it) will always be similar only in the greatest dissimilarity" (C.D. IV.1, p.636) and will not give human beings any glory or merit. Even so, "If we have become obedient to Him, it is inevitable that the divine humility in which Jesus Christ is the righteous man should be the pattern which we who believe in Him should follow" (IV.1, p.636). Our correspondence involves an imitatio Christi then, but this is an "analogy to His attitude and action" (p.634), a "corresponding and appropriate answer to the faithfulness of God as effective and revealed in His judgement and sentence"

(p.634). Barth is concerned here that such an imitatio Christi be understood in the context of relationship to Jesus Christ as its object and origin; it is a response to, just as our faith is a recognition and apprehension of, Christ's being and activity for us. According to this line of thought we can regard our participation in God as one of correspondent humble obedience to Jesus Christ, an imitatio Christi which retains Christ's priority as the one originating, sustaining and completing our participation in Him. (Barth tends to speak of 'faith' as the correspondent response rather than 'participation', but participation covers better both the noetic appreciation of who Christ is and what Christ has done *together with* our responsive, on-going, developing embodiment of such appreciation.[48]) Undergirding this correspondence are three analogies which we have already implicitly alluded to. First Christ's relation to humankind images the intra-divine, loving I-Thou relationship. Second Christ's "being for man repeats and reflects the inner being or essence of God and this confirms His being for God" (C.D. II.2, p.219); there is an analogy, harmony and similarity between Christ's divinity and his humanity. Third as Jesus is for God or for humanity, so human beings are for other human beings - there is an analogy between Christ's humanity and humanity in general. (Sin of course distorts this 'being for' into 'being against' as mentioned earlier.)[49]

For Barth our participation in God is not realised through some Neoplatonic ascent through intermediary beings, nor is our participation realised as we share in some ideal Platonic form of human being as exhibited in Christ. Participation is relational rather than substantive, and the concept depends for its force on the similarity-in-difference we find between ourselves and Christ. Alter-ation in Christian perspective is not simply my activity or the activity of the transcendental ego but is based itself on a relationship in which I have already been approached (in terms both of originary election and eventful revelation), by God who enables my alter-ation. Where doctrines of participation can often fail is in not appreciating that such alter-ation affirms creaturely particularity and

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48 That Barth tends himself to stress the noetic dimension when writing of faith can be seen in his understanding in C.D. II.1, p.9 of faith as 'mediated knowledge'; further "Faith is the total positive relationship of man to the God who gives himself to be known in his word... It is the Yes which man pronounces in his "heart" when confronted by this God... in the light of the clarity that God is *God* and that he is *his* God... In this event of faith the knowledge of God is realised" (C.D. II.1, p.12).

49 See A.J.Torrance for more on these three analogies, *Persons in Communion*, pp.180ff.

distinctiveness within the very process where it is tempting to assume creatures transcend their *humanly understood* limits. Perhaps the sort of transcendence with which human beings are involved in terms of participation in God can be understood analogously from Barth's understanding of God's transcendence. God's transcendence is not primarily a transcendence of utter difference and superiority for Barth (though this is true), but a freedom for that which is other than Himself which does not compromise Himself; "His freedom (is) not merely to be like the reality different from Himself, but to be as the Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer acting towards it and in it, and therefore as its sovereign Lord" (C.D. II.1, p.304). Only a God transcendent in this way makes it possible for creation and human creatures to become themselves, and our transcendence, our going beyond our own possibilities and becoming the human beings we are called in Christ to be, is actualised as we respond to God, such response having the character of a knowledge of God, an obedience to God, an invocation of God and, summarising all of these, a freedom imparted by God (C.D. III.2, p.192); "He (man) is free on his side to know God, to obey Him and to call upon Him freely" (Ibid., p.193). Fortunately Barth clarifies the distinction between God's transcendence and human transcendence[50] and elsewhere explains that our freedom for God and our neighbours is also a freedom from our being for ourselves, with all its attendant fears, anxieties and hopelessness;

> Since God is for him (man), he is relieved from the post of being for himself by the One who alone can be actually and effectively for him. He is relieved of all the care and all the fear of being for himself" (C.D. II.2, p.597).

If this approach to self-becoming is valid then we must begin with an appreciation that the self's beginning is not an isolated transcendental ego who relates to an Other and others but a situation in which relationships to others and to a creating Other is presupposed; in other words Barth's understanding of the human condition as one of "being in encounter" must be taken seriously. But then perhaps there is something in Buber's fundamental approach which highlights the initiality of the between. Theunissen argues that, in its favour

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50 "And if it is true that when man goes to God in his responsibility, knowledge and act, he too transcends the limits of the creature, yet this does not happen in the same unequivocal, irresistible and unchallengeable way as it does on God's side. If it takes place on man's side too, and perhaps even as his own act and not without a certain definiteness, certainty and joyfulness, it happens with all the difference between what he is enabled and obliged to do as a creature and what God is free and powerful to do as the Creator" (C.D. III.2, p.188).

..the primordiality that, as completedness, one is entitled to attribute to the matter of dialogical thought, seems to imply originality. Dialogic looks at the completing end insofar as it thinks the self-becoming of the I out of the meeting with the Thou. Self-becoming has, as its return home out of alteration, the character of a turning back to the beginning. I become myself - this means that I become what at bottom I am: I become what initially I already was... being in and out of the between.[51]

Plato's *Symposium* (189c-193d) contains one example of a philosophical myth about a prior unity out of which an individual is realised and for which the individual yearns. But more pertinent is the Judeo-Christian tradition of Creation with the mythical harmony of relations between human beings and human beings and God in the Garden of Eden, a lost origin which human beings long to re-establish. In this context the "solitude" of the transcendental ego is "no original fact" but a result of the fall from grace as Schelling pointed out.[52] Some interpreters of Buber suggest that Buber sees God as the reality of the between, that reality which links all relations with one another. Such an approach would have some problems establishing the personal nature of God and God might reduce to *relations* between others. Positively however, the thought suggests that authentically being in touch with others in ways which treat others as personally other (i.e. not as objects, not as material to be assimilated, dismissed or denied, but as persons warranting response, respect, engagement), indicate God's involvement, our participation in Christian love and indeed give an indication of the splendour of God behind it all, as Barth might contend.

While Buber's fundamental approach must be rejected for reasons highlighted earlier, the comments above suggest that there is a sense in which self-becoming through encounter with otherness is about a home-coming, a coming to oneself, a being what one was created to be. Barth's remarks often echo this theme, with his talk of *Heimkehr* and the idea of humanity's homecoming as a thematization of the Incarnation, together with his stress on becoming what we now are in Christ. One theologian who focuses carefully on these ideas, who we have already seen using the language of participation and who it might be instructive to contrast with Barth is Bonhoeffer. While Barth focuses primarily on the noetic dimension when discussing participation, Bonhoeffer focuses primarily on the ethical dimension. Of particular interest at this point are Bonhoeffer's 1932-1933 lectures *Creation and Fall* (hereafter CF), which reflect

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51 Theunissen, *The Other*, pp.378-9

52 Ibid., p.382

on the way in which our fallenness is reflected in the *cor curvum in se* of human beings and how, in and through the person of Christ, this inwardness is broken open and we are liberated for relations with one another which respect the other's transcendence and which embrace our own creaturely limitations rather than struggle against them. (There are parallels here with Barth, who also refers to Luther's terminology in suggesting that humanity is no *homo incurvatus in se* (cf. C.D. III.4, p.473). Such selfishness bespeaks our sinful, lost state, and is marked by an (at least implicit) refusal to live by God's grace.)

6.8 Bonhoeffer: Christ as Boundary and Centre

Bonhoeffer, in his commentary on Genesis 1-3 (CF) is partly concerned to understand Creation and Fall in terms of creaturely limitations, the creature's attempted trespass of such limitations, and their re-affirmation in Christ. Bonhoeffer sees the tree of life at the centre of the Garden representing life that comes forth from God who is in the middle. "Adam's life comes from the middle which is not Adam himself but God" (CF 50). Adam receives life not as an animal but as man;

> he has it in his obedience... ; that is, he has it in his freedom". The prohibition not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil means nothing to Adam but 'Adam, thou art a free creature, so be a creature' (CF 51).

> The forbidden tree that denotes the limit of man stands in the middle. Man's limit is in the middle of his existence, not on the edge. The limit which we look for on the edge is the limit of his condition, of his technology, of his possibilities. The limit in the middle is the limit of his reality, of his true existence"(CF 52).

'Limit' seems to be used here as that frame, form or structure which shapes us into what we are, i.e. human beings, and the recognition of 'limit' is then part of the task of grasping and living out our humanity authentically. Thus Bonhoeffer argues implicitly against that peculiar notion of freedom as freedom from determination, the freedom of emptiness[53]. "The limit is grace because it is the basis of creatureliness and freedom" (CF 52). (This understanding of freedom

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[53] By writing in this way Bonhoeffer avoids the difficulty with a purely voluntaristic understanding of the Fall - namely its obscuring of the conditions and discontent which cause humanity's prideful rebellion and to which the serpent can appeal. Bonhoeffer might have said more however about the Fall as an understandable response to the conditions of human existence, conditions such as finitude, non-necessity and vulnerability.

as freedom-in-relation is one of Bonhoeffer's strongest and most attractive themes.) The decisive difference between Adam and ourselves is that our history begins where his ends. Indeed we can only know about the beginning "from the new middle, from Christ, as those who are freed in faith from the knowledge of good and evil and from death, and who can make Adam's picture their own only in faith" (CF 57). Thus the Creation story reveals God's intentions and purposes for Creation and human beings, intentions we see realised in our own history by Jesus Christ and in whom we can see Adam's beginning as our eschatological fulfilment.

The Fall describes the transgression of our limits and our attempts to become our own creators, to be like God.

> Now he (man) lives out of his own resources and no longer from the middle. Now he lives out of himself, now he creates his own life, he is his own creator (CF 74).

> Man's being *sicut deus* in fact includes his not wanting to be a creature. Only God can address man in a different way. He can address man in his never-abolished creatureliness" (CF 74).

In his fallen state man hates his limit and thus acknowledges it in the form of shame (CF 80).

> He is not without the Word of God, even though it is the wrathful, repelling cursing Word of God. This is the promise. Thus Adam lives between curse and promise (CF 86).

It is precisely in respect of death, that most terrible curse, that we also see humanity living in God's merciful preservation. The serpent was right; Adam would be like God and not die the death of non-being; but the Creator was right too, in that Adam would die the death of being like God (CF 88). The death of death is the promise of the curse, a promise whose content we are able to see in the light of Christ's resurrection, but not one Adam was able to see (CF 89).

Christ is both boundary and centre for Bonhoeffer. In Christ our boundary is re-established because through faith in him our state of being turned in on ourselves is broken open. In revelation "alone human thought, which again and again seeks an I-enclosed system, is set free from such an enclosure and, at the same time, from the deadly isolation out of which there is no escape for those

without faith" [54]. We have already examined Bonhoeffer's understanding of the *cor curvum in se* in the last chapter so this need not detain us here.

Bonhoeffer's understanding is particularly interesting here as complementary to Barth's thought in the context of interpersonal relations. While Barth focuses on acts in, by and through which the other is present as an other person, Bonhoeffer focuses not so much on the acts whereby the other person is realised as such but with the mystery of that realising itself. More recently E.Levinas has focused on this 'realising', in terms of the 'face' of an other, that face which resists manipulation, assimilation and control, which calls forth compassion and responsibility[55], and which calls from a great 'height'.[56] But while for Levinas this realising is simply existentially apparent in the world, a realising of ethical responsibility which can be distorted by human beings as violence, murder, assimilation etc., for Bonhoeffer it seems to be a realising dependent on Christ's mediating influence, a realising whose fulfilment as compassionate obligation depends (whether we appreciate and acknowledge it or not), on Christ.

Christ is not only boundary but also our re-established centre for Bonhoeffer. In particular he is the centre in being-there for human beings. As Bonhoeffer puts is, the present Christ

> ..stands *pro me* . He stands there in my place, where I should stand, but cannot. He stands on the boundary of my existence, beyond my existence, yet for me... Here Christ stands, in the centre, between me and myself, between the old existence and the new. So Christ is at the same time my own boundary and my rediscovered centre, the centre lying both between 'I' and 'I' and between 'I' and God. The boundary can only be known as a boundary from beyond the boundary. In Christ man knows it and thus at the same time finds his new centre[57].

Where this approach goes beyond the dialogical self-becoming which is both a coming to oneself and a going out to others is in its stress on Christ as the person establishing this becoming and sustaining its proper mode (by for

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54 E.Feil, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, p.12

55 Levinas speaks of the nakedness and destitution discerned in the face, a vulnerability and fragility which demands compassion and struggle on behalf of the other against potential threats and violations. Farley speaks of this as 'emotional participation' and empathy. See his *Good & Evil*, p.42.

56 See for example E.Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A.Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 187-220

57 D.Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, pp.61-62

example rejecting assimilation of others to ourselves). For Bonhoeffer the only immediacy the believer has now is faith directed to Christ as centre, who mediates "not only between God and human beings, but between one human being and another, between people and reality"[58]. To live from this centre is not to reflect theologically on Christ; it is in its inner meaning ex-centrically oriented action as explained in the last chapter.

6.9 The Inadequacy of Participation as Ethical Transcendence

In the context of our discussion of participation and Otherness what is promising is Bonhoeffer's understanding of Christ as the person enabling our engagement with others without assimilation or dismissal but it remains to consider how exactly the *cor curvum in se* is broken open. An orientation towards our neighbours which embraces our responsibility and the claim our neighbours have on us is the way to grasping the 'reality'[59] of the other;

> on the epistemological and metaphysical path one never reaches the reality of the other. Reality cannot be derived, it is simply given, to be acknowledged, to be rejected, but never to be established by proofs, and it is given only to the moral person as a whole[60].

But in Bonhoeffer's thought this ethical transcendence can be separated from any sense of relationship to Christ if we accept that "the knowledge of Jesus is *entirely* transformed into action, without any reflection upon the human self"[61] (my italics). We have remarked on this weakness in Bonhoeffer's thought previously but why in particular is it problematic in connection with relating to otherness? It is problematic because it does not take human sinfulness seriously enough nor does it appreciate fully our dependence on God in Christ; we are constantly tempted in our actions and relationships not so much to attend as to assimilate, not so much to distinguish as to divide, not so much to serve others as others but serve others as reduced to the same or disserve

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58 D.Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, p.88

59 Bonhoeffer takes 'reality' to mean primarily God, God in Jesus Christ and "it is from the real one, whose name is Jesus Christ, that all factual reality derives its ultimate foundation and its ultimate annulment, its justification and its ultimate contradiction, its ultimate affirmation and its ultimate negation. To attempt to understand reality without the real one is to live in an abstraction to which the responsible person must never fall victim; it is to fail to make contact with reality in life..". See *Ethics*, p.228

60 *Sanctorum Communio*, p.88

61 *Ethics*, p.34

others as alien. Action in itself towards others may or may not be corrupted by such temptations. Christianity has resources to address such temptations however, especially through an awareness that Christ mediates otherness to us, the otherness of our fellow human beings and the otherness of God and that only as such are we authentically in touch with one another and with God. Our constant reductions and dismissals of otherness, our attempts to live from 'the same' can be addressed best not merely by our own ethical actions but by the narrative of Christ's life, death and resurrection which at one level can be read as humanity's rejection of Otherness and an addressing of this rejection by the wholly Other. The refusal of the Other to be finally dismissed (as in the resurrection where God refuses to be dismissed despite the murderous rejection of men), and the reestablishment of human beings (the reestablishment of their limit and centre in Bonhoefferian terms), is the ground of a way of being in relation to otherness which consciously resists the temptations to fall back on sinful patterns of relating to others. And what makes this way of being possible despite the discouraging failures and backsliding is a receptiveness to the offer of forgiveness rooted in the cross of Christ, a forgiveness which enables repentance and enables an *actus directus* which is constantly alert (because rooted in the story of Christ), to the temptations to corrupt relations with others. (This alerts us also, as Kierkegaard alerted us, to the temptations of theology and religious language, the temptations to claim a total perspective or control over otherness. A healthy suspicion about our accustomed ways of mastering others together with an awareness that God has spoken is required and perhaps *proper* theology is possible only as our discourse about God declines the attempt to take God's point of view (i.e. 'a total perspective')).

Precisely here we can begin to realise that participation simply understood as participation in Christ's (ethical) *way* of being is inadequate. Not only does it fail to take sufficiently seriously the need of the sinful human creature and the dependence of the human creature on that relation to otherness which alone can help in his/her waywardness and helplessness and which dependence defines the human creature, but it also stands in danger of losing Christ's distinctiveness and that of the human creature. Neither should we imagine that when human beings no longer sin they no longer stand in need or want of

relationship with God, because it is precisely in realising a dependent way of being which grounds our freedom in obedience to God that we come by the Christian perfection of sinlessness. Participation must be grounded in an ongoing dependence, a sense of human wickedness and human dissolution apart from God, a constant awareness of the temptations to 'independence' and the formlessness of 'independence' and therefore a continuously humble, penitent attitude in relation to God, even and especially in the midst of 'ethical' service. To say all of this is to say, in part, that participation must be grounded in the cross of Christ, a point P.T.Forsyth was quick to notice and a point we have made previously in our discussion of Calvin's thought. Forsyth writes of Christ's death that

> ..the penalty was his, the repentance remains ours. His expiation does not dispense with ours, but evokes and enables it. Our saving repentance is not due to our terror of the judgement to fall upon us, but to our horror of the judgement we brought on him. The due recognition of the wounded law was his, but the sense of having inflicted the wound is ours alone. Yet not possibly ours till we have acted on what was his. The truth of penalty is penitence.[62]

For Forsyth penitence is the Spirit-worked consequence of Christ's confession, acknowledgement of the righteousness of God and also "a sharing in the communion of the cross and a hallowing of his Name"[63]. There is here a participation in Christ. But our sharing is not a sharing in Christ's atoning victory so much as a repentance rooted in Christ's atonement, an acknowledgement of our part in Christ's crucifixion and a reception of the gracious forgiveness and reconciliation that God has provided;

> ..our repentance was latent in that holiness of his which alone could and must create it... In presenting himself he offers implicitly and proleptically the new humanity his holy work creates... He represents before God not a natural humanity that produces him as its spiritual classic, but the new penitent humanity that his influence creates.[64]

Our participation in Christ is then a thankful and joyful repentance, an involvement in Christ's 'confession' of God's holiness (a reverent recognition of the rightness and goodness of God's claim on creation), a "direct personal communion with Christ, based on forgiveness of sins direct from him to the

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62 P.T.Forsyth, *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1902), p.76

63 J.H.Rodgers, *The Theology of P.T.Forsyth* (London: Independent Press, 1965), p.183

64 Forsyth, *The Atonement*, p.188

conscience"[65]; "so understood as man's personal participation in communion with Christ, faith is salvation".[66] Our participation is faith that implies and realises faithful actions although

..faith is salvation; it is not rewarded with salvation. To be forgiven much is to love much, which is to live much and live anew. The new life is the faith which constantly takes home forgiveness, regeneration, reconciliation, and all they imply for the heart.[67]

But the cross of Christ is also definitive for the new humanity. Undergirding Forsyth's analysis here is an anthropology focused on conscience and free will; for Forsyth the human being

is more than a consciousness, he is a conscience. He is not only aware of himself, he is critical of himself. There is in the soul a bar, a tribunal; our thoughts and actions are ranged before it; judgement is passed there upon what we have been and done. Everyone who believes in morality believes in the conscience as the power we have in passing moral judgement about ourselves [68].

Our sense of responsibility is rooted firmly in the conscience and in our sinfulness we have chosen to abide by the authority of human law rather than holy law. God's action in Christ is the recreation of conscience, a recreation installing holy law as the Lord of conscience; finally 'the saved conscience is integrated into the justice of the universe'. Conscience is the "engrained gift of the Creator and we have no power by which to cancel or still its voice even if it pronounces us guilty" as Hall points out.[69] But by reestablishing our conscience as our sense of responsibility enabling us to exercise our freedom in accepting God's authoritative claim on us, we are reestablished as God's children. And while this authority is not alien, it is other[70] in that it is an external authority enabling us to be the human beings we have all along been created to be. The emphasis for Forsyth is clearly the moral life, and

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65 P.T.Forsyth, *Rome, Reform and Reaction. Four Lectures on the Religious Situation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1899), pp.92-93

66 J.H.Rodgers, ibid., p.184

67 P.T.Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments* (London: Independent Press, 5th Impression, 1955), p.199. This relates to Forsyth's understanding of sanctification's permanent condition being justification. See for example his *God the Holy Father* (London: Independent Press, re-issued 1957), pp.126-129

68 G.Hall, 'Tragedy in the Theology of P.T.Forsyth' in *Justice the True and Only Mercy; Essays on the Life and Theology of P.T.Forsyth*, ed. Trevor Hart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p.86

69 Ibid., p.87

70 See C.Gunton's article 'The Real as Redemptive' in *Justice the true and only Mercy*, ibid., p.43

for him it is the moral which is the real, and 'the spiritual world is not the world of noetic process or cosmic force, but of holy, i.e. moral order, act and power'. What is useful here is that Forsyth retains a sense of the ethical implications of our participation while rooting such participation in the cross of Christ, that place which is also the source of humble penitence, gratitude and awe. Our consciences, in grasping a new sense of responsibility in the face of the cross, simultaneously are aware of our responsibility for the cross so that all our conscientious actions are imbued with a certain penitent and self-critical attitude, and (going beyond what Forsyth explicitly says) all of our actions must be regarded suspiciously if they lack this penitential, self-critical dimension. Perhaps more than Barth Forsyth brings out the moral consequences of Christ's action for us humans, Barth concentrating primarily (certainly in his treatment of participation), on the noetic dimension. In the end of course our participation cannot be construed as primarily noetic with ethical implications nor as primarily moral with epistemological implications because both invite the dangerous possibility of a wedge that can be driven between faith and action, between the events of our lives and the events of Christ's life. A surer way forward is to root our participation in the narrative of the Incarnate one's life, death and resurrection, in such a way that participation in Christ becomes a participation in that story, not as we become the Christ of that story but as we become those human beings who realise in and through Christ who we have been and who we are now in him and who we are called to be.[71] Forsyth is especially strong when rooting us in the cross of Christ and stressing our participation in this aspect of Christ's life. But where Forsyth is weaker is in his neglect of the incarnational unity of Christ with all people, a unity reflecting our being elected by God in our creation as those beings who God is *for*. That stress in turn ties the doctrines of creation and redemption more closely, in providing continuities which Forsyth stretches to breaking point by focusing so narrowly on the cross.[72] Participation in the story of Christ is about being brought into relation

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[71] As Trevor Hart notes concerning our use of scripture, "we are called not simply to enter the world of the text in some sort of imaginative retreat from reality, but, having entered this world, to recognize it as none other than our own, and to begin the complex task of refiguring our own world in the light of this narrative presentation of it". See his *Faith Thinking*, p.152. Imagination may be of particular importance where this kind of participation is concerned, because as S.T. Coleridge noted, this faculty is at once both active and passive (as can be seen by philosophical reflection on the mind's self-experience in the act of thinking). See *Samuel Taylor Coleridge* in The Oxford Authors Series (Oxford: OUP, 1985), p.222

[72] C.Gunton, 'The Real as Redemptive', ibid., p.51

with Christ through the Spirit (and it is of course vital that an account of divine initiatives and human responses are explained pneumatologically if due space is accorded for the relationships there established to be other than coercive.) Participation in God is not to be understood according to some a priori ordering of knowing and doing; our participation is one involving personal relations and as such proceeds from the noetic to the ethical *and* vice versa. As we attend to one another we may come to know that our spirit witnesses with the Spirit to the fact that our service is one of obedience which can only be rendered because we have been freed for such service. But we may also come to realise, through our service, that our knowledge of God is truly authentic only as it is forged in the furnace of active obedience.

6.10 Conclusion

We began this chapter by considering Kierkegaard's views on the Otherness of God and relationship with God. Faith was the bridge for Kierkegaard, a faith realised at times as a divine gift and at other times as a human work it would seem. Occasionally Kierkegaard suggests that the most we can do to establish relationship with the wholly Other is to acknowledge our sinfulness. This consciousness of sin can lead the individual to acknowledge his total impotence before God, which is as much as the Kierkegaardian individual can do. It is at this point that faith becomes an imperative. Perhaps the most we can do in order to participate in God is to acknowledge our sinfulness and wait for God, trustfully and hopefully. But Kierkegaard leaves us with ambiguity and paradox; ambiguity concerning the part we finally play in relating to the Other, paradox in that the 'infinite qualitative difference' between God and ourselves makes it paradoxical that human beings can relate to God at all.

We then saw how Barth unambiguously suggested that the establishing and sustaining of relationship is entirely God's work, and Barth emphasised God's transcendence as one of being free for His creatures, able to relate as Creator, Redeemer and Reconciler without compromising His divine integrity. This loving freedom of God for His human creatures is the basis of our participation in God for Barth, a participation dependent on God's participation in humanity in Christ. Because of God's self-revelation in Christ we are able to participate in that in

which we would otherwise be unable to participate, the knowledge of God. The presence of the Incarnate Word realised through the Spirit is an open, participable event in which Christ can initiate human knowing into the very act of his incarnation. As such our relationship is one to be marked by gratitude, exuberance and awe. It is however only in relationship with God that our knowledge is prevented from sliding into idolatry, resistance to God and sinful assertions of human independence. Only in a *living* relationship with God in which we are responsively grateful, humble and obedient is there hope that noetic participation will not be corrupted by us. The revelation of God is also a revelation of humanity as it is meant to be in Christ, and if we truly acknowledge the revelation of Christ we will be set in motion to be the human beings God establishes us as being in Christ. Thus there is an ethical dimension to our participation. And Barth describes some concrete aspects of this ethical dimension 'horizontally' in his description of human being as a 'being in encounter'. However, in terms of our 'horizontal' and 'vertical' relations, it seems that authentic loving freedom for one another and true 'being in encounter' gladly depend on a prior noetic vertical participation as awareness of what God has done for us in Christ and who Christ is. (Such an analysis might suggest that the Gandhis of this world neither participate in God nor embody authentic being for others). Our participation can be viewed as a dynamic process of self-becoming through being for others rooted in a being for God, a process whose origin, sustenance and telos is Jesus Christ. Two modes of divine relationship provide analogy for human modes of relating in this participation; the inner Trinitarian life provides an analogy for inter-human relating (we have noted the relatively narrow Biblical grounding for such an assumption), and the covenantal relating of God and human beings in Christ provides an analogy for the divine-human relationship. Our reading of Barth suggested that our *correspondence* to God's faithfulness and action, God's freedom and love, can help to fill out what it is we mean when speaking of participation in God.

Bonhoeffer's approach in his lectures *Creation and Fall* shares many similarities with Barth except that for the early Bonhoeffer there is a certain dialectic[73] of obedience and knowledge in discipleship rather than an ordering

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[73] By 'dialectic' we mean statements which may appear to be contradictory but which are only true when stated together; so Bonhoeffer sums up "only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes", *Cost of Discipleship*, p.69

of knowledge and obedience as with Barth. However the later Bonhoeffer appears to elevate obedience and loose such obedience from its Christological moorings, participation in Christ becoming a sharing in Christ's way of being for others. This ethical understanding of our participation in Christ lacks an awareness of human helplessness and sinfulness in our bondage to ourselves, both of which imply the inevitable hopelessness and impossibility of our being for others without that Other's liberating commitment to us in word and deed. Only in the light of that commitment in Christ can we truly grasp the appalling weakness and corruption of human beings apart from God, and simultaneously realise the beauty, truth and fulfilment of ourselves in being with and for God (and the implications thereof for our being with and for one another). But our appreciation of this commitment is at once a participation in God, a participation which is an integrated response of faith and action, without prejudice to some schematic a priori ordering of knowledge and ethics. Our appreciation is evoked by the Spirit, who alone provides the timely and appropriate opportunities for our free response to God's commitment in Christ to us. On the one hand such response may begin with love of our neighbours. Not all reach faith in God via this route however, and even the sheep of the Matthean parable on the sheep and the goats show surprise when they are told that in ministering to others they have served God. And if our participation remains at this level we are forever in danger of slipping back into the *cor curvum in se*. Rather, as Bonhoeffer recognised in his earlier work, we must discern that it is God within us who enables our movement towards one another, and from there appreciate this God who is already for us, already forgiving us, already renewing us. Only with this appreciation and an awareness of Christ's mediating influence can we embrace our human being for one another without appropriating destructive notions of independence, isolation and freedom that lead only to a sense of futility,despair and failure. On the other hand our response may begin with an awareness of God being for us, rooted for example in a true hearing of the Gospel, leading us to worship, praise and thanks.

We mentioned how an understanding of participation as participation in the history of God's encounter with humanity in Jesus Christ provided a model for our participation which gives neither the noetic nor the ethical dimension a necessary priority. Forsyth's remarks on our sharing in the cross of Christ

provides a good example of what such participation entails; not a sharing in Christ's activity but the human response correspondent to that event and implicit within it, namely for Forsyth the confession of God's holiness, our gratitude and penitence, and a moral regeneration of conscience. (There is a trend in certain theologies which stress the suffering of God to see Christ as suffering with us in our suffering rather than we who are enabled through the Spirit to align our sufferings with those of Christ. The Biblical background suggests that we should stress the latter understanding (cf. Rom. 6:3f, Gal. 2:20, Rom. 8:17, 2 Cor. 1:5-7 etc.) and this is in accord with a view of participation in God that seeks to root our lives in the history of Jesus Christ). If however this is the way of participation, then we must note that the history of Jesus Christ is a history which has included the establishment of that body which bears explicit witness to Jesus Christ, the church, that body of believers who trust faithfully in Christ's commitment to them through the Spirit as they seek to live by God's grace. Given God's promises in Christ to be with his people as they seek to live in this way, it would seem at least recalcitrant to seek to participate in God apart from the ecclesial community. Our participation in the history of Jesus Christ is about allowing our own history to be caught up in his so that, as we are enabled to relate to Him through the Spirit, our freedom becomes the freedom of obedience to Him, our knowledge becomes a knowledge of the Incarnate one and thereby a knowledge of the Triune God, our responsibility becomes a responsibility to one another and to God originating in the Father's being for the Son and God's being for others in Christ, our service of one another becomes our service of Christ and on behalf of Christ, our forgiveness becomes Christ's forgiveness of one another etc.

Finally it should be noted that to participate in Christ in this way is not to forego a participation in the life of the triune God. Barth wrote of how the history of Jesus Christ was the external manifestation and repetition of the intra-divine history (see e.g. C.D. III.2, p.66), and while the notion of repetition might raise some problems, the linking in some way of the inner divine history with the history of Jesus Christ allows for an understanding of our participation in that history of Christ as being also a participation in the divine life of the Triune God. How this can be best understood remains to be answered. But before we turn to this question we must consider more closely, as promised at the end of our last

chapter, concrete ways in which participation in Christ is enabled and realised, and this will entail a more detailed discussion of sacraments and ecclesiology than we have undertaken so far.

7. PARTICIPATION AND SACRAMENTS

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you... He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him (Jn. 6:52,56).

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Cor. 10:16).

Scriptural texts such as these have long been used by scholars and Churchmen to give provenance to the centrality of sacramental activity in the church's life and such activity is described often, from St. Paul onwards, in terms of our participation. Irenaeus for example in arguing against certain Gnostic sects writes that

> Given that the cup which has been mixed and the bread that has been manufactured receive the Word of God and become the Eucharist - the body and blood of Christ - and that the substance of our flesh has grown and been strengthened out of these, how can they deny that the flesh which has been nourished by the body and blood of Christ, *and is part of him*, is capable of receiving God's gift of eternal life?[1]

While some scholars have rightly questioned the readiness with which it is sometimes assumed that it is the sacraments which are being referred to in key scriptural texts[2], the fact is that the mainstream of churches have long regarded the sacraments as being a central part of their *modus operandi*, although the interpretation of quite what is going on in such activity has varied greatly. So far our study has tended to discuss in rather broad terms the nature of our participation in worship and service, in 'humble obedience' and 'correspondent love and freedom' and our interest here is in exploring the use of the notion of participation in understanding sacramental practice with a view to seeing how sacramental participation (and ecclesial life) gives us a concrete focus to our participation in God, and how this dimension fits with other dimensions of the notion (such as the ethical and the epistemological). Our discussion will concentrate on the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.

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1 Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, V.2.3, my italics.

2 With John's Gospel for example the range of scholarship could be summarised in terms of four broad positions; 1) The FE was indeed a sacramentalist (e.g. O.Cullmann); 2) he was concerned to revise an understanding of the sacraments held in his day (e.g. C.K.Barrett); 3) not the evangelist but a later redactor is responsible for the sacramental passages in the gospel (e.g. R.Bultmann); and 4) there is no sacramental teaching in the gospel at all (e.g. C.H.Dodd).

7.1 Calvin and the Eucharist

Our discussion of Calvin's understanding of the Eucharist provides a useful starting-point because, it will be recalled, Calvin wishes to retain a sense of deepening unity with God through Christ by sacramental acts but not in such a way as to undermine the efficacy of the person and work of Christ in realising our salvation, nor in such a way as to suggest that participation in Christ is an automatic benefit of sacramental practices. Calvin argues that "we maintain no other presence than that of a relationship".[3] For Calvin the Body of Christ remains at the right hand of the Father in heaven, interceding for us, underlining humanity's forgiveness and acceptability in Christ to God. Yet we do participate in this very Body in the Eucharist because the Spirit lifts us to heaven to participate in Christ[4]. Calvin suggests a number of different purposes which the Eucharist serves, as we saw in Chapter 4, and in particular Calvin contrasts the embodied, material participation in the sacrament with the reception of 'mere knowledge'[5] . While we have seen that assurance of salvation and justification do not rest upon participation in the sacrament for Calvin, such participation brings with it benefits to our faith and a distinctive sense of our unity with Christ such that "by true partaking of him, his life passes into us and is made ours - just as bread when taken as food imparts vigour to the Body".[6] Further the fact that the way of this participation is contrasted with the way of "mere knowledge" indicates that Eucharistic participation, involving as it does, material, physical response, is profoundly more than intellectual assent. Calvin's remarks are not inconsistent with the view that authentic participation is wholistic, involving the whole person, mind, body and soul.

7.2 Participation in Christ's Sacrifice

Calvin points out at *Institutes* IV.xvii.8 that the faithful are to open the bosom of their hearts to embrace the Eucharistic Lord, suggesting believers have an

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3 Institutes IV.xvii.13

4 "I hold that Christ is not present in the Supper in any other way than this - because the minds of believers (this being a heavenly act) are raised by faith above the world, and Christ, by the agency of his Spirit, removing the obstacle which distance of space might occasion, conjoins us with his members", see Calvin's *A short Treatise on the Lord's Supper* (1541), in *Calvin's Tracts and Treatises* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,1958), vol. 2, p.280.

5 Institutes IV.xvii.5

6 Institutes IV.xvii.5

active part to play in participation in Christ. However this active role is not so much a participation in that which Christ does but in the benefits which Christ has achieved for us, so far as the Eucharist goes. This is a point of some moment because other Eucharistic theologians consider our part in the Eucharist to be much more than simply the reception of benefits long since achieved for us by Christ. For example Dom Gregory Dix in his historical analysis of the meaning of the Eucharist claimed that one can trace

> ..the gradual elaboration of a synthesis of all the main ideas about the Eucharist into a single conception, whose key-thought is that the 'action' of the earthly Church in the Eucharist only manifests within time the eternal act of Christ as the heavenly High-priest at the altar before the throne of God, perpetually pleading His accomplished and effectual sacrifice.[7]

No new sacrifice is being offered but the *same* sacrifice as Christ offered in Himself is being offered in the Eucharist; "because the Eucharist is essentially an action and the church in doing that action is simply Christ's body performing His will, (so that) the Eucharistic action is necessarily His action of sacrifice, and what is offered must be what He offered."[8] This argument depends partly for its force on a quite literal application of the 'Body of Christ' phrase to the church, and Dix argues for the "*physical* truth" of the identification of church and the Body of Christ from the New Testament.[9] Passing over for now the propriety of such an identification, a major difficulty with this understanding of our participation in Christ's sacrifice is that it rests on little New Testament evidence, being bolstered only by some similar patristic interpretation. While we find clear evidence of the ascended Lord as the high priest continually interceding for us from the throne of grace in Hebrews, we find no such emphasis on Christ's on-going *pleading of his sacrifice.* Richardson notes that in the letter to the Hebrews

> Christ is seated in the seat of the Vizier, not standing in the posture and place of the suppliant. He intercedes for us, but with the effective power of the co-ruler seated on the right hand of the sovereign God. Because of what he has done in history there is no more offering for sin (10:18).[10]

Besides this, the force of the contrast between Christ's 'once-for-all' sacrifice

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7 G.Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster: Dacre, 1945), p.251

8 Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, p.246

9 Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, p.246

10 A.Richardson, *An Introduction to the theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1958), p.202

and the daily sacrifices of the Aaronic priests at Heb. 7:27 and Heb. 9-10 would be somewhat lost if the Christians' high priest was repeatedly offering His sacrifice. Again Christ's kingly rule and priestly intercession can be better interpreted as resting on the accepted, completed nature of his sacrifice; precisely because of the reconciliation with the Father effected through Christ's sacrifice, confirmed and accepted in the resurrection and ascension, the church is able to draw near in faith to the throne of grace, assured of the extraordinary privilege of access to God because of her high priest who has passed into the heavens.[11] In view of all this, the idea that we participate in Christ's ongoing pleading or indeed that Christ's pleading is ongoing all seems quite dubious.

Perhaps the root difficulty here is one involving temporality. Is it simply the case that if the sacrificial death of Christ is *now* present in the Eucharist then this somehow devalues or disempowers the understanding of that sacrifice on the cross? Only if our Trinitarian God is constrained by the creaturely limitations of linear time. Instead of arguing for a sacrifice "presently operative by its *effects*" in the Eucharist, Dix would have done better to assert that the Eucharist involves the Spirit relating us to that event in a manner granting a certain synchrony-in-diachrony, a kind of contemporaneity-across-time. The primary thrust here is not of the church contributing to the narrative of Christ's crucifixion and sacrifice but our entering into his narrative through the Spirit, a movement reconstituting ecclesial identity as (for example) no longer a despairing, purposeless, fearful group but (in the light of the 'completed' narrative of Jesus Christ), a hopeful, directed, loving body trusting in the (proleptically anticipated) promises of God. On this understanding the redemptive act of Christ on the cross is not reiterated but eternally active through the Spirit. This understanding assumes that the Triune God is not subject to creaturely time in the sense of past events being irredeemably past, and that in some sense in God past, present and future are at one.[12]

A second problematic area concerns the potential identification of the church's

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[11] This argument is primarily scriptural, while the Anglo-Catholic argument ascribes more weight to a synthesis of scripture and patristic doctrine. It is however only with some considerable ingenuity that the Anglo-Catholic method can consistently coordinate patristic doctrine and scripture without allowing the latter to undermine the former.

[12] K.Barth writes of God's eternity as "pure duration", here "beginning, succession and end... do not fall apart", but "between source, movement and goal there is no conflict but only peace". See his C.D. II.1, pp.608-640.

self-offering or sacrifice and that of Christ. It is one thing to respond to Christ's sacrifice in a self-sacrificial way, but quite another to regard our sacrifice as *part* of Christ's self-offering. Indeed the latter can only hold with the supposition that we completely identify church and Christ. However, as Aulen points out,

> ..it is true that nothing more important can be said of the Church than that it is the body of Christ, which implies that Christ identifies himself with his Church. But the profound truth of this statement does not permit us to turn around and say that the Church is Christ. If this last statement were valid, and if we thus identified the action of the Church with Christ's own action, we could without difficulty say that the Church offers Christ. The offering of the Church would then be identical with Christ's own sacrifice. But if the sacrifice made by Christ once for all is primary in relation to the Church, this identification becomes impossible. The sacrifice of Christ is and remains his own sacrifice, eternally valid, present in the Eucharist, but entirely his own, not the Church's sacrifice.[13]

It can still be argued that the church participates in Christ's sacrifice, if by this we mean that Christ's completed sacrifice is offered up to the Father by the church through the ministry of the priest, the church 'offering' that perfect sacrifice to the Father of which she is the beneficiary. The concept of sacrifice needs some unpacking here. We might note that the Israel of the O.T. used a variety of sacrificial practices and notions in a somewhat eclectic fashion; similarly "in the N.T. we find sacrificial concepts and language appropriated when they fit what Christ did and calls us to do, rejected when they do not, and if convenient transformed to *make* them fit".[14] Sacrifice came to be used by Christians in a way which involved

> ...the giving over of oneself out of love... Over against the usual cultic separation of priest and offering there occurs here a decisive new interpretation: Jesus Christ worked redemption, in that he poured out his own blood; he is priest and offering at once.[15]

This entails a "...personalising of the notion of sacrifice: it is no longer a matter of

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13 G.Aulen, *Eucharist and Sacrifice* (London: Oliver & Boyd,1958), p.911. This need not entail a separation of God's agency from the church nor a pretence of ecclesial passivity. Rather, "when the church is understood with ontological seriousness as the risen Christ's body, an appropriate dialectic of identity and difference between God and the church must result. I *am* my body; yet I *have* my body. What my body does, I do; and yet I as subject must determine what my body shall do, and "in the flesh" have to struggle to make my body obey. Thus what the church does is done by Christ the Logos; and yet he is free over against his church and, indeed, so long as the church is in the flesh, must often reform his church". R.W.Jenson, *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), p.128.

14 R.W.Jenson, *Unbaptized God*, p.39

15 Okumenisches Arbeitskreis evangelischer und katholischer Theologen, "Das Opfer Jesu Christi und der Kirche: Abschliessender Bericht," *Das Opfer Jesu Christi und seine Gegenwart in der Kirche*, ed. K.Lehmann and E.Schlink (Freiburg: Herder, 1983), 4.1.

giving something, but of giving oneself."[16] The church's self-offering within the Eucharist is analogously and responsively sacrificial to that founding sacrifice of Christ and participates in that sacrifice by such self-offering, an offering which responds not only to the gift of Jesus' offering of himself to the Father but also the offering of communion with him. The Lutheran R.W.Jenson puts it well;

> Jesus' sacrificial act on the Cross is his giving of himself *to* the Father *for* us and inseparably his giving of himself *to* us in *obedience* to the Father. *What* he gives is therefore communion: our communion with him, and just so our communion with the Father and with one another. Just so again, the content of this encompassing communion is our sharing in Jesus' "own life and fate", which is to say, in his self-giving, his sacrifice. Precisely in that Jesus sacramentally gives himself to us in the bread and cup of the Eucharist, all these dialectics belong also to the event of the Eucharistic meal, of his giving the bread and cup and our receiving them. The sacrament of his self-giving to us incorporates us as a communion, as the church, precisely into the communion of his sacrifice of himself and of us to the Father.[17]

Again care is needed here that the church's salvation is not wrought by our good works performed with God's help (semi-Pelagianism); nothing is achieved by the church in terms of contributing to Christ's atoning work by this offering. Rather the emphasis needs to be on the church's receptivity and on the fact that the church's offering reminds the church not of her own contribution to her salvation but of her total focus on God's free gift of salvation, which free gift the church shows herself to be embracing by (for one thing) her Eucharistic thanksgivings and her self-offering to the Father through and because of Christ's self-offering. On this understanding our participation in Christ in the Eucharist is based on Christ's sacrifice rather than being a contribution to that sacrifice. Further, it is a correspondent and continuously dependent responsiveness to what Christ has done and who Christ continues to be for us.

7.3 The Dynamic of Giving and Receiving

Christ's sacrifice enables the church's sacrifice, a sacrifice which is a self-offering and an offering of symbolic gifts and praises which the church knows will be received by God in Christ. As Rowan Williams puts it

> ..we bring ourselves near to the altar of the cross as we come and offer our gifts - and we are encouraged to do so because the way is open through the flesh of Christ - and we are brought to the Father as we claim the fruition of the covenant proclaimed in the paschal event. Through the Spirit's work, the covenant is 'renewed' in us, in our re-entry into the 'sanctuary' of Calvary.[18]

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16 Ibid., 4.2.1.

17 R.W.Jenson, *Unbaptized God*, p.40.

18 R.Williams, *Eucharistic Sacrifice - The Roots Of A Metaphor* (Grove Liturgical Study No. 31, 1982), p.27

This interpretation of the church's sacrifice is significant because while it does not suggest that we contribute to the salvation wrought in Christ, it yet indicates one aspect of what it is to be the church growing into the salvation given in Christ, it is one dimension of that process of sanctification whereby the church becomes what she finally will be. In her self-offering the church in no way bargains with God but enters into that structure of giving and receiving, that system of communication, of eternal praise and activity of gratuitous love which the church sees in the offering of the Son to the Father. This self-offering, this giving, is already a receiving in terms of justification, access to God, the *possibility* of giving and the very gifts to give, so that the church participates in a dynamic of giving and receiving. The church shares the relationship of giving and receiving to and from the Father with Christ, although only sharing this relationship insofar as the church is *in* Christ.

In relation to the notion of participation as involvement in the dynamic of giving and receiving the anthropologist J.Van Baal suggests that

> ..true giving is participating, participating in the life and work of the donee, participating in one's universe as a sympathizing member. No one can participate without giving first. Giving is essential for a meaningful existence. The simple food-offering set aside for the gods, the clumsy prayer before meals, and the give-and-take characteristic of mutual care in the small group, are the most real and effective means of communication, cementing togetherness and confirming security. All communication begins with giving, offering.[19]

Without giving, offering and sacrifice communication is not established (or else it remains a one-way street) and human beings remain enclosed within themselves. God's gift of Himself in his Son breaks in to that situation of enclosedness, demonstrating our value in His eyes and giving us a share, a participation in that eschatological life and world which is in communion with Him in Christ through the Holy Spirit. The church's giving is a giving back, a response to God's giftedness and an embracing of that share in the Kingdom of God.[20] T.F.Torrance captures the importance of our dependence on Christ in this Eucharistic dynamic, stressing that the Eucharist is "the sacrament of our

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[19] J.Van Baal, "Offering, sacrifice and gift", in *Numen* vol. *xxiii* (1976), pp.177-178

[20] J.Milbank demonstrates skillfully how the notions of receptivity and reciprocity are conditions for gift being gift, to the extent that "we participate in the trinitarian exchange such that the divine gift only begins to be as gift to us at all... *after* it has been received - which is to say returned with the return of gratitude and charitable giving-in-turn - by us". See his 'Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic', *Modern Theology* vol.11, no.1 (Jan. 1995), p.136

continuous participation in Christ and all he has done and continues to do for us by his grace, whereby we live unceasingly not from a centre in ourselves or our own doing but from a centre in Christ and his doing".[21]

It is however not just the human beings who belong to the church which the church offers up in the Eucharist for participation in Christ, nor is it the whole of humanity but rather the whole of creation is offered back to the Father through Christ. John Zizioulas makes much of this point, arguing that the human being is the representative of creation who in his priestly action refers creation back to God the Creator at the anaphora.[22] Here the human being links God and the world in a way which can redeem creation's being-unto-death which is there because "the world having come out of nothing and being penetrated by it does not possess any means *in its nature* whereby to overcome nothingness". In priestly action the human being links creation with the only eternal and immortal being through whom it can survive, God. The place of Christ in this priestly action becomes clear once we understand that Christ did what Adam failed to do, that Christ as the embodiment and *anakephalaiosis* of all creation, the human being *par excellence* and Saviour of the world, provided the model of our proper relation to the world, the priest of creation, by referring himself and creation in himself to the Father, liberating creation from its subjection to death and enabling it to be as it was meant to be. (On our understanding then our participation in Christ's priesthood mentioned earlier is partly about this 'lifting-up' of creation and therefore one aspect of our participation in God). Zizioulas goes on:

> On the basis of this belief, we form a community which takes from this creation certain elements (the bread and the wine) which we offer to God with the solemn declaration "Thine own of thine own we offer unto Thee', thus recognizing that creation does not belong to us but to God, who is its only 'owner'. By so doing we believe that creation is brought into relation with God and not only is it treated with the reverence that befits what belongs to God, but it is also liberated from its natural limitations and is transformed into a bearer of life. We believe that in doing this 'in Christ', we, like Christ, act as priests of creation. When we receive these elements back, after having referred them to God, we believe that because of this reference to God we can take them back and consume them no longer as death but as life.[23]

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[21] T.F.Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), p.101.

[22] J.Zizioulas, 'Preserving God's Creation. Three Lectures on Theology and Ecology', *King's Theological Review* 12 (1989), pp.4-5

[23] Zizioulas, 'Preserving God's Creation', lectr III (1990), p.5 One quibble we have with this statement is that in saying "we like Christ" Zizioulas fails to stress sufficiently the fact that it is Christ's priesthood alone on which we depend, and to speak of human priesthood is to speak of participation in the vicariously given and perfect priesthood of Christ.

Zizioulas' thought is of considerable interest because in terms of the language of participation, it becomes clear that the redemption of creation depends on participation in the life of God through the mediating influence of the human being in Christ, a participation looked forward to and yet at the same time most clearly actualised in the Eucharistic anaphora. It should be noted however that Zizioulas does not speak of participation but of communion (for reasons we will explore later), and he suggests if

> ..communion is the only way for truth to exist as life, then nature which possesses neither personhood nor communion "groans and is in travail" in awaiting the salvation of man, who can set it within the communion-event offered in Christ. Man's responsibility is to make a Eucharistic reality out of nature, i.e. to make nature, too, capable of communion.[24]

7.4 Baptism

If in the Eucharist we must take care to distinguish Christ's atoning sacrifice from our sacrifice and understand our participation as based upon and responsive to Christ's person and work, then we must exercise similar care in understanding our baptism in relation to Christ. If the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ become the ground for our participation in Christ, how are we to understand Paul's remarks that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:3-4). What Paul does not imply by this is that Christ's baptism and the dynamic of events concerning his life are merely exemplary for us. It seems rather that baptism is the seal of our being incorporated into that dynamic whereby our salvation was wrought for us. Baptism is not even primarily a decision or response by a believer here so much as a symbol of God's initiative and proactive work of redemption and faith is a fruit of this redemptive work. The corporate dimension should be highlighted here for "by one spirit we were all baptised into one body" (1Cor. 12:12); baptism places us in the community of the Spirit and it is the faithful community who in the power of the Spirit brings new members in to the community through baptism. There is a sense in which the community believes 'on behalf of' the baptismal candidate, a notion which retains the primacy of God's saving initiative towards the baptismal candidate prior to the candidate's

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[24] J.Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p.119

faithful response and which also points to the community's responsibility to nurture and support the newly baptised person into appropriate responsiveness to the salvific grace of God in Christ. This does not mean that the baptised person can gradually come 'to stand on his own two feet' apart from the church, because baptismal identity and appropriate responsiveness include being a part of that interdependent body which serves and is served by other members. Neither does the community operate in place of the Holy Spirit; the community is defined by its relation to the Spirit and is truly itself as it mediates God's Spirit through appropriate relationships within itself and 'between' itself and the 'world'.

Baptism is the point of entry into the church and incorporation into the Body of Christ. It can be understood further as the beginning of our participation in Christ where participation is understood as activity based on a prior receptivity to God's salvific action[25] and which involves ethical, ecclesial and sacramental dimensions.[26] Baptism is the church's response to God's promise in Christ to bind himself to his faithful people because in baptism the church acknowledges that being embedded in a community which Christ indwells enables relationship with God in Christ to be realised, epistemologically combining knowledge about and knowledge by acquaintance, ontologically affirming a network and pattern of relationships centred on Christ, worshipfully and ethically oriented by and on the person of Christ. Further, by baptism we not only enter into membership of the church, but also begin to participate in the church's reality as a visible, historical sign of God's grace in Christ. Rahner explains that the church enables

> ..the grace of God (to) be present in the world as an event, as an ongoing event with historical tangibility and with incarnational corporeality. Anyone who receives grace in baptism by being

[25] As T.F.Torrance puts it, "Baptism is the sacrament of our once and for all participation in Christ, and may be spoken of as the Sacrament of Justification, which is not to be repeated". *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1976), p.150. Further, "..the Reality of our baptism is to be found in the objective reality of what has already been accomplished for us in Jesus Christ and is savingly operative in us through the union and communion with Christ effected by the Spirit". *Theology in Reconstruction*, p.94

[26] A question arises here concerning the place of those unbaptised but impressive individuals such as Gandhi; do those such as he participate in God in any sense? One might argue "possibly, but only partially, in an ethical but not ecclesial or sacramental sense". But all participation is "partial" in one sense or another and the concept of participation is designed in part to bring together the various dimensions of our relational existence with one another and God. Given this, the primary practical application of 'participation' is not as a means of reaching conclusions concerning the eschatological status of the likes of Gandhi but as a tool for self-criticism in assessing where discipleship of Christ is partial.

incorporated into the Church... necessarily receives along with the grace of the Church a share in, and the mandate and capacity for participating in, this function of the Church to be the historical tangibility of God's grace in the world.[27]

Participation in Christ is not to be understood here as an automatic benefit of baptism but an ongoing process, which process is acknowledged as depending entirely on God's prevenient graciousness in Christ at baptism and which develops as the new member of the church embraces this graciousness and responds to the call to be that which s/he is called to be in Christ.

7.5 Sacramental Causality

It is worthwhile reflecting for a moment on the *ways* in which Baptism (and the Eucharist) are effective of our participation in Christ. It is important that baptism (and indeed the Eucharist) are not understood in terms suggesting that they 'cause' a particular relationship between God and the recipient in some sort of impersonal or automatic way, as if by executing certain acts with certain words we would thereby realise God's grace. Against such a view we would stress (with Calvin) the sovereign freedom of God and also the understanding of the sacraments as not so much an isolated means of grace but a concrete way of presenting the grace of God in Christ which 'brings home' the truth, reality and actuality of the gospel of salvation. (And this' bringing home to us' is not narrowly intellectual, but material, palpable and tactile, as Calvin noted). The reality of Christ's atoning work is presented and received in the sacramental acts but this giving and receiving of which the sacramental acts are loci is based on the completed act of God in Christ, incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension. God's promises of grace are made present in the sacrament because God binds Himself freely and faithfully to these promises in the sacraments in such a way as for the sacraments to be signs, seals and guarantees of those promises. While this gives an 'objective' pole to sacramental actions, an existential or subjective pole is still present because God's gift requires acceptance, the faithful receptivity of the believer.

One problem potentially created by such an understanding of the sacraments as signs, seals and guarantees of God's promises is that it would seem in danger of depersonalising sacramental activity, as if sacramental life involved

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[27] K.Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (London: DLT 1978), p.416

the cashing of I.O.U's, promises written by God to us and realised as legal tender through the processes of sacramental celebration. To offset this danger we might juxtapose a second way of understanding the sacraments, complementary to the first, which more precisely stresses the personal becoming present of God in Christ through the Spirit and our personal response. God's presence is assured, a presence we are enabled to realise by the Spirit who relates us to the risen ascended Lord, but it remains for us to be truly *with* God. The sacramental act focuses us on God, just as our prayer life and other ecclesial activities seek to focus us more intently on God, and the appropriate response then of the recipient is attentiveness, to be truly with God rather than merely being alongside God, or beside God like a chair is next to a table. As G.Marcel puts it, albeit in a different context, we can

> ..have a very strong feeling that somebody who is sitting in the same room as ourselves, sitting quite near us, someone whom we can look at and listen to and whom we could touch if we wanted to make a final test of his reality, is nevertheless more distant from us than some loved one who is perhaps thousands of miles away or perhaps, even, no longer among the living. We could say that the man sitting beside us was in the same room as ourselves, but that he was not really *present* there, that his *presence* did not make itself felt.[28]

Sacraments do not specify a presence of God which is any the less real outside of sacramental activity but they do provide concrete ways of focusing on and relating to that presence, ways which trust faithfully in God's promises to be so present to His people.

It might seem as if 'receptionism' is lurking in the background here with the attendant danger, highlighted by some scholars, of a divorcing of spiritual reality and outward sign.[29] While it is true that the gift of God's grace can be set at nought (temporarily at least) by the faithless recipient, this is not because we play a semi-Pelagian part in enabling the sacraments to work but because God in his freedom has given us the space to receive his promises as presented to us. If the model is one of promise/ratification, gospel/sacrament, then it is not so much a question of an objective divorcing of spiritual reality and outward sign as the faithless participant being able to divorce the two. Neither does a stress on the existential reception of the believer necessarily drive a wedge between faith as some 'inward phenomenon' and its 'external manifestation' in good

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[28] G.Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, vol.1, ' Reflection and Mystery' (London: Harvill,1950), p.177

[29] See for example O.C.Quick, *The Christian Sacraments* (London: Nisbet,1932), p.213

works. What we believe is understood not simply from what we intuitively comprehend or feel but also from what we say, from what we do, from our obedience. The sacramental acts themselves are not to be devalued in favour of some interior measure of faithfulness because the sacramental acts are part of the mode of our faithfulness, expressing our obedience. If more attention was paid to the faithfulness involved in obediently receiving the sacraments perhaps there would be less anxiety in certain quarters about whether there has been a 'worthy' reception or not.

This of course raises the whole debate concerning the relationship between external rites and their performance and intentionality and interior orientation. Paul is in no doubt of a distinction it seems when he writes to the church at Corinth that whoever

..eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord... For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself (1 Cor. 12:27-29).

Earlier in the same letter Paul makes it clear that to take part in ceremonies where food is offered to idols and pagan sacrifices is to forego authentic participation in the Eucharist; "You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (1 Cor. 11:21). It is not enough simply to go through the motions of the Eucharist without consideration of one's interior disposition and without reflection on activities which may sit uncomfortably with this action. (In connection with this we should recall how in the synoptic tradition Jesus flags up the importance of inward disposition in terms of ethical action, as when he is recorded as identifying the heart as the source of human defilement (Mk. 7:21-3) and when he sees a prior adultery in the heart which is forbidden no less than the act of adultery (Mt. 5:28)). However, it is a big step from these remarks to concluding that

..the outward represents the inward, and the inward which is represented is far higher than the outward which represents it; therefore while the inward is essentially necessary for the reality of the outward, the outward is only conventionally necessary for the reality of the inward.[30]

Indeed we would question those who ascribe such importance to the distinction between inward and outward. Paul is not drawing attention primarily to the

[30] R.C.Moberly, *Ministerial Priesthood* (London: John Murray, 1897), p.vi

distinction between inward disposition and outward activities in criticising the Corinthians but rather attacking the inconsistencies of their practices; to partake of the body and the blood is to be part of the Body of Christ and this has ecclesial and ethical as well as sacramental implications for Paul. These implications are flouted by those who persist in pagan practices and thus they cut themselves off from the Body of Christ. Again in the synoptic accounts Jesus' target is often those who do not practice what they preach, those whose outward displays are not part of a person's living relation to God but which are self-delusory, hypocritical and self-serving. The plea is not to adjust inward disposition so that outward acts automatically bear good fruit, but that attention be paid to the inconsistency of espousing relationship to the Father while yet speaking, thinking and acting in the manner in which they do. Besides all this, how is one to know what another is thinking except on the basis of their acts? And is not speaking an 'outward' act? The myth of some Cartesian inner me which reveals itself to the outside world at certain points in time may often be lurking behind much of the 'inward/outward' debate. The sacramental acts of participation in the body and blood of Christ are part and parcel of what it is to be the Body of Christ, acts whereby the promises of Christ are to be received but acts which must in no way be separated from the ecclesial and ethical components of being 'in Christ' and belonging to the Body of Christ.

7.6 Communion and Participation

Coming back to the issue of sacramental participation, one of the difficulties some scholars have with the idea of sacramental participation in Christ is that it is assumed that "participation always presupposes a given, fixed and permanent reality in which we participate, whereas the Body of Christ is constantly constituted anew in the Spirit".[31] This is one reason why scholars such as Zizioulas prefer to speak of "communion" rather than participation. However it should be clear that we have not been suggesting a participation in Christ in such a Platonic fashion but rather a dynamic involvement and sharing in the life of Christ's body, the church. The manner of Christ's taking form among us needs to be given some attention if we are to unpack what we mean by speaking of the church as the Body of Christ here. Rather than saying that the

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31 J.Zizioulas, *The Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.* (Unpublished paper given at a Research Seminar at King's College, London, Spring 1993).

Body of Christ is constantly constituted anew in the Spirit by the Eucharistic event, a line of thinking which does not seem to escape the charge of occasionalism, we must reflect upon the Spirit's *ongoing* relationship to Christ which is the source of Christ's being who he is and which is a sustained and sustaining relationship throughout Christ's life, not a series of events which constitutes Christ again and again. Similarly the church as the Body of Christ is sustained by a constant relationship to the Spirit, a relationship which enables the church's participation in the constitution of Christ among us, insofar as the service of the church, its sacramental devotions, worship, actions, relationships, obedience and witness allow Christ to take form in the church. Occasionalism is avoided in that the Spirit is always (though freely) bound to the church (and the church ever remains that place where God promises to be present in Christ through the Spirit), and the church is the Body of Christ in so far as she participates in the constitution of Christ in the world. None of this is to suggest that God cannot act in other ways in which the presence and activity of Christ through the Spirit is realised in the world, but the church is that public, concrete grouping where God has promised to be present in Christ through the Spirit. The church has the awesome responsibility to ensure that it does not hinder this presence. Neither does this line of thought necessarily suggest that the church is only sometimes the Body of Christ; the Spirit is always bound to the church but the way of God presenting himself can vary. The church here is actually participating in the Spirit's work of constituting Christ, as well as participating in Christ as it allows itself to be constituted by the Spirit in a manner which enables it to be the Body of Christ in the world. Thus, on our understanding, participation is not in some given fixed and permanent reality, but it is participation in the dynamic of permanent relationships, and in particular our stress here is on the dynamics of the Spirit's relationship to Christ, in which we participate as Christ is constituted as the church.

7.7 Eschatology and History

This way of understanding participation in God allows us to grasp better the eschatological dimension of the Eucharistic act. John Zizioulas argues that the

Eucharist is that moment in the Church's life where the anticipation of the eschata takes place. The anamnesis of Christ is realised not as a mere reenactment of a past event but as an anamnesis

of the future, as an eschatological event. In the Eucharist the Church becomes a reflection of the eschatological community of Christ, the Messiah, the image of the Trinitarian life of God. In terms of human existence... the transcendence of all divisions, natural and social...[32]

For Zizioulas the church draws its identity from the future, she " is what she is by becoming again and again what she will be".[33] The trouble with this approach is that it so focuses the eschaton on the Eucharist that the temptation is simply to see one's faith in terms of Eucharistic celebration without and apart from any sense of the social, moral or missiological aspects of obedient faithfulness. Paul McPartlan, in his comparison of the Eucharistic thought of De Lubac and Zizioulas, observes that

..the evidence suggests, paradoxically, that when history brought to its completion is so resolutely seen as the reality dominating history, something essential to the very drive of history towards its completion is lost. He (Zizioulas) must, therefore, explain in more detail than he has so far that this is not necessarily so and that, far from rendering history redundant, the Eucharistic inbreaking of the eschaton provides the vital means whereby, as the flow of history continues, Christians can discern what is truly of God and build upon it.[34]

If we see the Eucharist as being one way in which the church participates in the Spirit's relationship to Christ by realising itself as the Body of Christ (a realisation based on Christ's self-offering which enables the church to present itself as the Body of Christ to the Father), then we retain the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist where all things are gathered up into one in Christ. However there are implications of this Eucharistic self-realisation[35], namely that the church is the Body of Christ in the world, in service, witness, proclamation and mission. In this way the historical church does not determine the nature of the eschaton but becomes an instrument of its permeation of history, as others are brought to Christ and the Father's will is done. The Eucharist is a focus of the church's eschatological identity which empowers her to be even now what she will be. But if the church will finally be the Body of Christ which it celebrates and realises itself as being in the Eucharist, where is the motivation to take

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[32] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p.254

[33] Zizioulas, 'The Mystery of the Church in Orthodox Tradition' in *One in Christ* 24 (1988), p.301

[34] P.McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church, Henri De Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), p.299

[35] The term "Self-realisation" is meant to echo Macquarrie's point that the Eucharistic unifying of past, present and future parallells the constitution of the self; "it is the realization in a particularly intense way of the dimensions of temporality; and since it is this unity which constitutes selfhood, then we can make the further claim that worship is creative of selfhood". See his *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1966), p.435

history seriously? The motivation rests in love, in being the loving Body of Christ, in being that Body which is concerned for its members and those beyond itself, in seeking to bring the lost back to God, in seeking to serve the humanity for which Christ died, in seeking to participate in the Spirit's ongoing work of sanctification. (And the sacraments are a vital component of the church's life here, because as the Spirit acts through the church's sacramental activities new members of the church are incorporated, fellow members of the Body of Christ). The urgency and motivation is one of love, but it is one of love for *sinners.* The potency of sin is such that the *possibility* remains that sin can place us outside of the Body of Christ in the course of history, and history remains the arena for the conflict between the fallen world and the eschatological church, the Body of Christ. While in a sense the eschaton entered history in the incarnation and determined our standing before the Father through the salvation wrought in Christ, nevertheless our reception of this salvation in time is the space afforded by nature of the personal relationship each human being has with God. History is the opportunity for participation in the Body of Christ and the space given to us to respond to God's free gift and if we truly have this space then, hypothetically at least, we may refuse God's grace. On this understanding it becomes clear that the church must engage seriously with history, as the Body of Christ which loves and seeks the well-being of sinners within and without herself. Even in the Eucharist this must happen, as we refuse the temptation to live from ourselves, as we live from God's grace in Christ, as we recognise men's hostility to God, the ways in which we corrupt ourselves and God's message, as we acknowledge and embrace God's forgiveness and promises, reassured that even though we have pushed God away from us we have not forfeited the possibility of new life, as we consume the elements of new life resolutely and thankfully.

Perhaps Zizioulas is unable to take history sufficiently seriously because he does not dwell on human sinfulness. In any case he reveals his anxieties about the significance of history when he writes that

> I agree with the view that the incarnation introduces eschatology into history but this does not mean that the eschatological God has been enclosed by history. The eschaton must be allowed to reaffirm itself anew, and this is the essence of the Eucharist as I understand it. Otherwise the eschaton does not determine history but history captures the eschaton.[36]

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36 J.Zizioulas, 'Eschatology and History' in *Whither Ecumenism?*, T.Wieser (ed.) (Geneva: World Council of Churches,1986), p.73

However we would resist talk of the 'determination' of history by the eschaton or of history 'capturing' the eschaton, as if one must control the other. The eschaton became history in Jesus Christ, this historical person showing in his person that destiny to which human beings (and all creation through human beings) are called in him. This person has bound himself through the Holy Spirit to the church so that, in the concrete, public fact and act of the church the eschaton appears as the church properly responds to this binding by being the Body of Christ. This is not to say that the eschaton *determines* history, in that the church can and has shown often enough that she has acted in ways at odds with the vision of humanity and the Kingdom which Christ sets before her. But neither is it to say that history *captures* the eschaton because as the church allows herself to be the Body of Christ she realises her eschatological reality, participation in Christ here being primarily a historical receptivity to the eschaton rather than an active moulding of its content or shape.[37] (This historical receptivity is only to be logically distinguished from the concrete obedience which overlays it, the danger being that a temporal disjunction can create the possibility of ethical quietism once more or Bonhoeffer's 'cheap grace'.) This receptivity together with the inextricable obedience which is implied by it make up the church's participation in Christ, a participation which is also a participation in the Spirit as we have seen. This historical receptivity is not to be thought of as standing over or against the eschaton but rather, as in the Eucharist, is to be considered part of the space afforded to relate to the eschaton.

7.8 Further Reflections on the Ontology of Participation

We have suggested an understanding of our participation in God which involves our participation in the relationship between the Spirit and Christ, participating in the constitution of Christ in so far as the church becomes the Body of Christ in the world and participating in Christ in so far as the church is the Body of Christ in the world, led by the Spirit and oriented towards our Father

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[37] At an individual level this can be related to the way in which, as they conform to the will of God in Christ, Christians become aware that "this is how it was meant to be", and that here it is God who is making us rather than us building our way to perfectedness. Even so, at a secondary level it would seem that individuals *may* be able to mould the content of the eschaton actively in so far as there is the possibility that individuals can exclude themselves from the Kingdom.

and Creator. This idea of 'participating in the constitution of Christ in the world' needs some teasing out however because it is not as yet clear what we mean when we suggest that the church is the Body of Christ. In particular is this participation functional, ontological or both? In other words are we participating in Christ in that we do as he would do, or do we participate in Christ because we *are* in some sense Christ? Our answer to this question depends upon an assumption of ontology (mentioned previously) as involving three interrelated dimensions, what we are, the way we are and that we are. The church is that place where the 'what' of our being in Christ is recognised (hopefully) and where human beings seek to live in accordance with that being in Christ. To speak of the church being the Body of Christ ontologically is accurate in that relationship to Christ bears ontological weight and has immediate implications for our way of being (as the church seeks through the Spirit to conform to that which she is in Christ and will be eschatologically). However there is still room here for the church either to realise or not to realise herself as the Body of Christ in terms of the way of her being in the world, so that functionally the church may or may not realise temporally that which she is in relation to Christ through the Spirit. The functioning of the church is one aspect of the ontology of the church, her way of being, so that we can argue for a participation of the church which is both ontological and functional. Even if the church is not functioning in a manner appropriate to her being the Body of Christ, one dimension of her ontological participation is retained as God remains freely bound to her. (Individualism is avoided here. The conforming of the way of our being to the what of our being is essentially the task not of an individual but of the whole community in which the individual is set, because that conformation involves the entire spectrum of the individual's relations within the community.)

Notice that this approach guards against a purely ontological participation, or a purely functional participation, or a participation which simply identifies the functional and the ontological. The danger with seeing our participation in Christ as purely ontological is that it suggests that the church is Christ in a way which confuses the church's contemporary and eschatological states and which flies in the face of much of the historical church's un-Christlikeness. Further, it hands over to men the grace of God and the sovereign Lord of the church stands in danger of being perceived as under the church's control. God is not

bound to the church in a way which ontologically *identifies* Christ and His body but is bound to the Church in Christ through the Spirit, a binding which has *ontological implications* for the church which fall short of ontological identification with her Lord.[38] On the other hand, the danger with understanding the church's participation in Christ in purely functional terms (so that the church participates in Christ in so far as she does that which Christ would do in her place) is the danger of Pelagianism; without an undergirding relationship to Christ of ontologically transforming significance here the church is left being that institution which, through her imitation of Christ participates in Christ and is subsequently sanctified. In opposition to this view, sanctification must be more closely tied to justification (as argued in earlier chapters), and both more closely tied to the person and work of Christ, so that the church's participation in Christ is understood as a responsive activity dependent on relationship to the incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended Lord.

Why then is an identification of the functional and the ontological not an appropriate way forward? If the ontological reduces to the functional, then we are what we do and the dangers just highlighted above loom large. If the functional reduces to the ontological then what we do is simply a result of who we are, which stands in danger of stifling the space required for there to be authentically personal relations of giving and receiving between human beings and God. Different theologians may err to one of these two poles in their work. Zizioulas for example manages, for example to place "the entire matter of Ordination outside the dilemma of choosing between *ontological* and *functional*", because for Zizioulas, as McPartlan notes "to have an (ontological) ecclesial identity is to have a (functional) relationship and role, *here and now*, ...". What McPartlan fails to notice and what a close analysis of Zizioulas' thought reveals is that Zizioulas so stresses the functional as to stand in danger of the way of being becoming determinative of the what of being. In other words the ontological is reduced to the functional, the functional being given so much ontological weight as to suggest that if our way of being is identified with God's

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38 Some Orthodox conceptions of the church as the Body of Christ seem to reverse the fact that the church is the Body of Christ and see the Body of Christ as being the church. So Zizioulas for example argues both that the church "has no *hypostasis* of her own but draws her identity from Christ and the Kingdom to come"(p.302) and that Christ's identity is "dependent on the existence of the Church"(p.303). We would want to distance ourselves from statements akin to the latter while agreeing with the radical dependence of the ecclesial community on the person of Christ for ecclesial fruitfulness. See J.Zizioulas, 'The Mystery of the Church in Orthodox Tradition'.

ecstatic way of being by our way of being we can transcend all creaturely limitations. Rather, we should see our way of being as in some sense catching up with what we have become in relation to Christ, a catching up which we can understand in terms of a progressive participation in Christ through the Holy Spirit, a catching up which is initiated, enabled and completed (eschatologically) by the Spirit. Such a view has ontological implications for participation in God which suggests neither a devaluing of the person and work of Christ, nor a Pelagianising theology.

How then are we to understand the church as the Body of Christ? We are to understand by this that the church stands in intimate relation to Christ through the Holy Spirit, a relationship which has ontological implications for the church (because of the transformed relations to the persons of the Trinity which the church now has) and which enables the church's (functional) Christlikeness in the world. Participation in Christ involves sharing in this being the Body of Christ, a sharing which develops by 'degrees' in terms of our way of being as we more closely conform to Christ, or, better, as Christ takes form in us. Paul does not separate the ecclesial, ethical and sacramental components of the Body of Christ and we should keep all three closely tied in our understanding of participation. To participate in Christ while neglecting any one of these stands in danger of imbalancing the notion of participation entirely. For example without the Christological foundation our participation might reduce to winning salvation for ourselves, offering our own sacrifice at the Eucharist for example. Without the ecclesial dimension our participation can become simply my participation, an individualistically conceived relationship to God lacking the horizontal dimension (which is of ontological significance as Christ is mediated to one another through these relations and because who we are is forged, in part, by our relationships) and leading to ethical indifference. Besides, if we accept that the church has been promised God's abiding, faithful support and guidance (and that its continued existence indicates this) then it would seem somewhat recalcitrant to seek relatedness to God by other means. Without the sacramental dimension a concrete focus to our participation which is grounded in God's initiative in Christ and ecclesially embedded is lacking. The sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist draw out the nature of participation as response to God's prior initiative, obedient faithful response, joyful self-giving and thankful

worship rooted in our justification before God and they are part of the process of our sanctification as we continue to realise God's grace in Christ and right responsiveness to that grace. Further, the material, bodily nature of this kind of participation reminds us usefully of the wholistic nature of participation in involving the human being in his/her totality.

Sacramental participation is also in a sense participation in the Trinity because in her self-offering the church enters into that structure of giving and receiving, that system of communication, of eternal praise and activity of gratuitous love which the church sees in the offering of the Son to the Father. An interpretation of the church's sacrifice as respondent self-offering in service, praise and thanksgiving does not suggest that we contribute to the salvation wrought in Christ, but it indicates one aspect of what it is to be the Church growing into the salvation given in Christ, it is one dimension of that process of sanctification whereby the Church becomes what she finally will be. To argue that one could find other foci such as meditation or social activism is acceptable in that being the Body of Christ involves both prayer and moral action. It is unacceptable as an argument however if such activities were suggested as a replacement for sacramental participation because it would seem to involve a wilful neglect of particular concrete means instituted by God in Christ by which our faith is quickened and our participation deepened.

This argument brings us back to sacramental participation and in particular the provenance of such participation. The argument may seem to depend for its force on the assumption that our Lord did indeed institute the Eucharist and baptism as sacramental acts incorporating human beings more deeply into himself through the Spirit. While this assumption is one which the mainstream of Biblical scholars accept, some theologians prefer not to leave themselves hostages to the fortunes of Biblical exegesis. Our position does not stand or fall by the authenticity of the words of institution, however, because one can understand the church's interpretation and response to the scriptural testimony as one including sacramental activities, activities which are faithful to the wider implications of the Biblical record than merely the words of institution in living by God's grace, embracing salvation in Christ, celebrating the forgiveness of sins, appreciating our new-found status before God and participating in that dynamic

of giving and receiving which is found at the heart of Jesus' relation to his Father.

But which ecclesial communities are authentic? Where is God binding Himself to the gathered faithful and where is genuine participation in God happening? These questions find their place in the wider context of ecumenical debate in the late twentieth century. This debate has embraced concepts such as *koinonia* and participation, terms which appear able to admit of degrees and allow such as the Second Vatican Council generously to admit that between the Roman Catholic Church and other communions 'a certain but imperfect communion exists'.[39] Without entering into a detailed discussion of the contemporary state of this debate we might note that our understanding of participation allows for a legitimate diversity in ecclesial communities without defining explicit, rigid boundaries to *legitimate* diversity.[40] Certain parameters are implicit however. Non-Trinitarian conceptions of God would make conceiving of participation in God in the way in which we have understood it well-nigh impossible; participation which is not a synthesis involving for example communal, liturgical and ethical dimensions falls well short of the kind of communion we are proposing; communities denying the radical (and on-going) dependence of the church on its transcendental and foundational Lord empty participation of one of its key components; patterns of life and service which contrast sharply with the stable frame of reference for discipleship discerned against the historical background of scripture, tradition, interpretation and experience are at least questionable as genuine participation in the tasks and purposes of God.

Our analysis of sacramental participation carries with it certain implications for sacramental ontology. We are not viewing the Eucharist or baptism simply as "events of communion"; to do so lends itself to a number of difficulties. To speak

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[39] *Unitas Redintegratio*, 3

[40] S.Wood writes that "the spiritual reality of *koinonia* consists in the invisible spiritual presence and action of the Spirit dwelling within the faithful. Since the mediatory vehicles of *koinonia* effect participation in the Trinitarian life, they effect a communion that is deeper than common belief or common activity. Various ecclesial traditions tend to place different emphasis on the importance of these visible structures. For example one could trace a continuum from those traditions emphasising visible elements of *koinonia* to those emphasising an invisible action of the Spirit.. All would affirm the presence of *koinonia* within their tradition, even though the forms it takes varies." See her "Ecclesial *Koinonia* in Ecumenical Dialogues", *One in Christ*, vol.30, no.2, 1994, p.143.

of such an event is at once to downplay the seriousness with which God has entered into relationship with his church; God does not simply relate to the church now and then through disruptive events which presumably need further revelatory events. To view revelation in this light is to underestimate the commitment of God to His church in terms of binding Himself to the church and it is also to depersonalise God's relationship to His church somewhat. A figure who occasionally and unpredictably bursts in to another's life with guidance or support etc. compares unfavourably with the friend who is "always there for us", and the former lacks that ongoing relatedness which bespeaks personal commitment. It may also bind God to having to repeat Himself constantly. One reason for preferring event-type language is that it appears to protect God's freedom and prevents the church from thinking that she somehow 'possesses' God. But our analysis in no way infringes on the sovereign Lord who relates Himself to the church freely, faithfully and continuously, and whose mode of relating Himself varies (as challenging, comforting, clarifying etc.) God's freedom is the freedom of love, a freedom which transcends that impoverished notion of the freedom not to be committed. Our position should be distinguished from a theology of God's presence which goes no further than stressing that we are not alone but that God is 'with' us in being present to us. Maurice Wiles adopts such a position and quotes G.Marcel approvingly:

> when somebody's presence does really make itself felt, it can refresh my inner being; it reveals me to myself, it makes me more fully myself than I should be if I were not exposed to its impact.[41]

However Wiles leaves no room in his thought for this presence to *present itself*, and without that dimension, a dimension Marcel is aware of, our relationship with God loses its personal, particular quality and dissolves into an intangible immanence. In contrast, our position assumes a faithful commitment on God's part to His church which involves God presenting Himself continuously, in variable ways.

The fact that sacramental participation involves focussing on God's presence to His church suggests that such participation may be eventful for participants without meaning that God abandons His church between Eucharists or even during parts of the Eucharist. A revelatory dimension to the notion of

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41 M.Wiles, *Faith and the Mystery of God* (London: SCM, 1982), pp.122-123

participation involves (within the Eucharist for example) both personal and propositional aspects, set firmly in the context of a worshipping community. As we attend in such worship to the movement of God in Christ towards us in the Spirit, a movement given content by our propositional 'knowing about' God through the scriptures and tradition handed on to us, we personally engage with this movement as God the Father becomes *our* Father for example. Propositions help to fill out the relationships which we gradually realise we are placed in and, while being interpretations of relationships and secondary to actions involved in such relationships, are a vital (communally grounded) part of the process of participation. The personal and propositional dimensions of revelation must be held together here; to lose the personal is to ignore that we 'know more than we can tell' and that there is knowledge by acquaintance as well as propositional knowledge; to ignore the propositional is to forget the communal, linguistic framework in which our experience is self-reflectively set and the fact that relations with others involve knowing about them. Indeed the propositional can mediate the immediacy of personal relation (maintaining separation, otherness and yet unity), and the personal can provide the immediacy of communally mediated propositional revelation (maintaining actual relation). (Immediacy here is not meant in the sense of instantaneous but as presence presenting itself).

7.9 Conclusion

Our reflections on the notion of sacramental participation have concentrated on the Eucharist and Baptism and have stressed the nature of such participation as dependent upon Christ's person and work, not identifying Christ's atoning sacrifice with ours or Christ's baptism with ours but basing our sacramental activities on them and relating our sacramental activities to Christ through the Spirit. The triune God alone creates the possibility of participation in Himself and we progressively realise this participation as we respond faithfully by offering ourselves (and all creation) to the Father in Christ in the Eucharist. Baptism marks the individual's acknowledgement and response to God's initiative in Christ, beginning the process of participation which has Christological, ecclesial and sacramental dimensions. This process is (ontologically) about the way of our being conforming to the what of our being in

Christ, it is about our (the church's) constituting and being the Body of Christ in the world, it is about sharing in the relation of the Spirit and Christ, it is about realising our eschatological destiny in Christ. The church as the Body of Christ is sustained here by a constant relationship to the Spirit, a relationship which enables the church's participation in the constitution of Christ among us, insofar as the service of the church, its sacramental devotions, worship, actions, relationships, obedience and witness allow Christ to take form in the church. (Put this way, not only worship but our whole life of faith is more 'gift' than 'task') Sacramental activity (particularly in the Eucharist) draws out concretely the nature of participation as response based on the prior initiative of God in Christ, acknowledges the dependence of participants on God's initiative, trusts in the promises of God to be present to his church in such acts and focuses on that which the church will be and is in Christ. As we have already stated, sacraments do not specify a presence of God which is any the less real outside of sacramental activity but they do provide concrete ways of focusing on and relating to that presence, ways which trust faithfully in God's promises to be present to His people. Sacramental activity provides one concrete way in which we participate in Christ, relating us to the Father in Christ through the Spirit in such a way that our materiality, our creaturely being, is not so much transcended as set in life-giving relationship with God, retaining the distinction of Creator and creature while enabling the liberation of the latter from sin and death. Sacraments, together with the ministry of the Word, worship in general, prayer and the ongoing mundane struggles to transform our actions and world in the light particularly of Christ's life, death and resurrection constitute that (not necessarily exclusive) context in which God promises to make Himself known, to enable our conformation to Christ, to nurture our participation in God.

8. PARTICIPATIO DEI

It is possible to build an understanding of participation consistent with the pointers we find in scripture and which draws on the insights of the theologians we have considered in our study. To see this we shall analyse the notion from various (interrelated) perspectives including the ontological, epistemological and ecclesial, in the hope that these perspectives will cohere in our suggested way of approaching participation.

8.1 Ontological considerations

With the life, death and resurrection of Christ humanity is ontologically changed in that it now stands differently related to its potential destiny, meaning and hope, in Christ. Our ontology (of the human) assumes three interrelated dimensions, what we are, the way we are and that we are. Because of the reconciliation effected in Christ between God and human beings, the 'what' of our being, which was previously introverted through sin and which was the subject of gravely distorted relations with God and fellow human beings, this 'what' of our being has been redeemed and transformed. A new mode of relatedness with God has been realised, born as the fruits of Christ's life, death and resurrection. And it is vital to appreciate that this ontological transformation is a result of a change in the nature and quality of relationships that human beings now have with God through Christ. It is not a case of some 'substance' of humanity commonly shared by all that is cleansed or transmuted, but a case of a difference in personal relationships, relationships being at the very core of who we are. By becoming incarnate and living a life of obedience to the will of the Father, the Son perfects humanity, particularly in terms of right relatedness to the Father, other creatures and the creation. This is not simply to see human-ness as some Platonic universal which is put right by Christ and which thereafter we participate in for salvation. The universal significance of Christ lies in the way in which our humanity is now able to relate to God in and through Christ. Such a relation is of ontological significance in making humanity a new creation, a new creation 'hidden in Christ'. As God's creatures we have always been related to the Creator but the manner of that relationship is transformed by Christ's incarnation among us. Atonement is significant here in realising God's

justice, our forgiveness and evoking right human responsiveness. But while atonement focuses primarily on God's initiative towards humanity in Christ , participation for us is a broader term incorporating atonement but also focusing on our response to God through Christ. With the life, death and resurrection of Christ humanity is ontologically changed in that it now stands related to its potential destiny, meaning and hope, in Christ.

However it remains for human beings to appreciate the quiddity of their being in relation to God in Christ (cf. Rom. 6:13). Following Barth in seeing all humanity as elected in Christ we can understand all humanity to have been made a new creation in so far as we are related to God in Christ through the Holy Spirit as creatures forgiven and reconciled to God. Participation is about conformation to what we really now are, beginning with the realisation that we are already participating in Christ by dint of Christ's person and work. 'Become what you are' means 'Grow into your character, accept the outline of your particular form of life...' (C.D. III.4, p.388). We are to take up humanity's relationship to God in Christ which we realise exists as we look to Christ, and participation is partly about relating ourselves appropriately to God in Christ, becoming those human beings who are for God (and one another) as we appreciate from Christ that our true humanity is a being for God (and for one another). The new creation is revealed to us as we live it out in worship and in the life of communities of mutual respect, love and service, when what we are in Christ is truly affirmed by the way we are in the world.

A second ontological issue concerns the nature of the inner Trinitarian relations and how their relationships are distinguished from our participation in the Godhead. We have seen (e.g. Chapter 3) how we can understand the divine persons as related in an eternal *perichoretic* union, a relationship ontologically distinct from our relationship of participation in God. The distinctiveness lies in the fact that perichoresis involves a unity understood as ontological interpenetration mutually constituting the divine persons (a substantial union) whereas participation involves a one-way dependence which stresses God's role in realising and sustaining human beings where there is no substantial identity. Both perichoresis and participation can be understood dynamically (and aspects of the thought of the Cappadocians prompt this approach). The

issue of deification (which we will explore further below) is affected by the perichoresis/participation contrast of Trinitarian/Creator-creature relations, and the contrast provides ontological grounds for seeing our eschatological status as distinct from that of the persons of the Godhead.

8.2 Freedom

This analysis suggests an understanding of our freedom as the option to allow ourselves to be conformed to Christ or not. This view of human freedom assumes that God leaves us the (at least provisional) freedom to reject Him, that God effects a salvation for us which depends on our free acceptance of it, a position which provides for the possibility of (eventually) universal salvation and which entails moral responsibility. As argued in Chapter 4, the Holy Spirit creates the conditions for a genuine decision before Christ so that it is only as God relates to us that we are enabled to embrace God's call. Thus our notion of freedom perfected is not simply a naked freedom of choice but a freedom of obedience moulded in concert with the Holy Spirit which leads to the freedom to choose rightly.[1] This kind of freedom involves a libertarian account of choice without necessarily lapsing into a kind of synergism. We can retain a relational account of God's activity which is not primarily synergistic but dependent on God's initiative here. Accounts of this relationship such as "O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed" can be seen from this perspective not as debasing our humanity but as acknowledging the glory of the human being to rest in the dependent relation of creature to Creator. There is here a blend of compulsion and freedom. An analogy might be the decision to marry, which at one and the same time may be experienced as a decision utterly freely taken and also as a decision one may feel compelled (in a positive sense!) to take. Paradoxically one is aware of being most free and most compelled simultaneously.[2] Or again the blend of freedom and compulsion one experiences occasionally in bearing true witness or in self-

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[1] It is unwise to see freedom of choice in the sense of freedom from limitation as the human being's distinguishing feature and the seat of the imago Dei (pace Zizioulas). Unwise because this leads to an individualistic conception of the (fulfilled) human being, a conception corrosive of the 'freedom-in-relation' which gives direction and meaning to human freedom of choice.

[2] T.F.Torrance, writing of the shaping of Calvin's mind, notes that for Calvin "freedom, compulsion, personal relation are all involved in knowledge of God. This is the *legitimate knowledge* of the *pious mind* in which he knows God in accordance with the way he reveals himself and keeps to the *line* of the Word and Truth of God". See his *Calvin's Hermeneutics*, p.86.

sacrifice. Further, it seems to be the case among many who most single-mindedly pursue what they see to be God's will that the element of choice recedes and the element of compulsion comes to the fore and the sense of God's grace in enabling and guiding becomes ever clearer, and ever more sought after. On this account we find our true freedom not to reside so much in an ever-expanding degree of freedom from limitation but in a deepening realisation and embracing of our creaturely limitations as dependent, derived beings together with a deepening realisation of the transcendence of fallen and false limitations such as death and the drive to live from ourselves (based on the liberating realisation that God is for us).

This kind of freedom inevitably realises love as its content, love for the God who creates, redeems and sanctifies, love for the neighbour before whom we are response-able in Christ. This kind of freedom corresponds to the freedom of God which primarily is not to be construed as a freedom from creation but as a loving freedom for creation, albeit a non-dependent, underived freedom. The distinction between God's and human freedom also suggests a correspondence and distinction within human and divine loving. While the divine love towards creation is primarily agapeistic (spontaneous, uncaused, creative of value and relationships) and deriving from that erotic (seeking our proper fulfilment, desiring union), human love is primarily erotic (desiring completeness, discovering value, born from want) and subsequently agapeistic (freely giving as we have freely received for example). To participate in God here is to share the loving freedom of our God in a manner appropriate to our creatureliness. Participation in God's love is quite different from the Platonic understanding of love where interpersonal relations are focussed entirely on a common, sought-after ideal. Otherness and haecceity are not valued in Plato's thought and the ideas of for example seeking the other for the other's sake and self-enrichment through relation to the Other rather than by assimilation of the peculiarity and distinctiveness of the Other, such notions are absent from the Platonic corpus.

8.3 The Way of Participation - Ecclesiology, Sacraments and Ethics

When does our participation begin? We would argue that it is simultaneous with our election. If so, we should remember with Barth that this election is not an

election following on from our being created but is implicit in and the purpose of our being created. The sustaining of creation in being can be regarded as a manifestation of the ground God provides on which our (active) participation can be established, unfold or be realised. There is a sense then in which we are already participating in God as created, elected human beings. Creation is the beginning of the history of our participation in God. But there are two tiers to this participation, an underlying, grounding tier which is of God's initiative and where creation is entirely passive. Creation itself, election and (symbolically) baptism belong to this tier. But a second overlying tier involves God's initiative and our respondent obedience. This tier is the history of grasping that we are chosen in Christ for life in Him. There is a qualified sense in which our participation begins with baptism in that the second tier of our participation begins to be actualised thenceforward. But more strictly, our participation begins with our creation (as Augustine suggested), which is also our election. However, our election requires as its confirmation, concrete manifestation and implication, participation in the Body of Christ, election being an election *to* become or to become in being, the goal being in Trinitarian terms our perfected relationship to the Father in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

One might wonder where we would place the genesis of faith on this understanding. Is faith solely due to God's gracious initiative or do we play a part in its realisation? Or in the terms above, does faith find itself in the first or second tier of participation? The answer is that faith is not to be compartmentalised in this way. A better understanding can be found in Jüngel's notion of faith as 'creative passivity'. If we understand this aright, it suggests that human faithfulness is service which allows God to perform His work. It is true that Jüngel stands in danger at times of allowing his Lutheran leanings to lead him to an over-emphasis on human passivity such that human beings become mere functions of God's action. But faith is a relationship here, a relationship initiated by God which requires the correspondent activity of the human person for its actualisation. Undergirding the act of faith of the human agent is a prior passivity of faith;

> Our being is not our work. Humanity does not make itself. But we can and should make something of ourselves. Our creatureliness in no way excludes but includes human creativity. Our passivity liberates activities.[3]

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3 E.Jüngel, 'Lob der Grenze' in *Entsprechungen. Gott-Wahrheit-Mensch. Theologische Erorterungen* (Munich: Kaiser,1980), p.375

This approach gives room for God's prevenience and superordination without devaluing human action; indeed God's prevenient action elevates the status of the human activity of faithful response. The difference between faith and participation is one of emphasis, the former stressing the prevenience and superordination of God's action, the latter stressing our correspondent response. However both terms must find room for the stress implicit in the other if errors akin to Lutheran passivity, synergism or Pelagianism are to be avoided. Further, faith and participation overlap in terms of characteristics such as repentance, decision, trust and loyalty.[4]

Participation is not to be thought of in narrowly intellectual, individualistic or anti-materialistic terms, all possibilities within a Platonic or Neoplatonic view of the way of participation. At its best Platonic thought intertwined the elements of reason, love and freedom but even then the communal emphasis which we found in Paul was lacking; where our participation reduces to an individualistic quest we can be sure that it is not the corresponding obedience analogous to Christ's attitude and action indicative of authentic participation. The individual is set within a community which gives orientation, form and direction to understanding, language and action. The Christian community is that body which provides the context for the individual's participation, a participation which is inextricably related to the church's participation in Christ. We have suggested earlier an understanding of our participation in God which involves our participation in the relationship between the Spirit and Christ, participating in the constitution of Christ in so far as the church becomes the Body of Christ in the world and participating in Christ in so far as the church is the Body of Christ in the world, led by the Spirit and oriented towards our Father and Creator. The church is that place where the 'what' of our being in Christ is recognised and where human beings seek to live in accordance with that being in Christ, sacramentally, ethically, and worshipfully.

Our reading of Barth suggested that our *correspondence* to God's faithfulness and action, God's freedom and love, can help to fill out what it is we mean when speaking of the way of our participation in God. Our responsive freedom and

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[4] M.Buber's analysis of Hebraic faith as *Emunah* is of note here, despite his misguided contrast of *Emunah* with a narrow and misleading understanding of Christian concept of *pistis* as belief-in. See his *Two Types of Faith*, trans. N.P.Goldhawk (New York, Harper & Bros., 1961)

love, based on God's freedom and love for us, provide the way of our transcendence by which we participate in God, a transcendence not of creaturely limits as such (limits which give definition to our love and freedom), but a transcendence[5] of the *cor curvum in se.* Bonhoeffer's comments on Christ as boundary and centre are pertinent here. As boundary Christ is that person *through whom* we can relate to others without assimilation, dismissal or trespass of their transcendence. Relationship with others through Christ entails sharing an awareness of who such others are to God (and thus puts us in touch with who others *ultimately* are), realising how Christ identifies with such others (e.g. Mt. 25:31-46), understanding their value and participating in Christ's loving service of them. And this is a *liberation* as well as an ethical imperative, to be able truly to recognise, relate to and serve our neighbours in their otherness without the destructive drives to assimilation or dismissal.[6] But we are liberated by Christ as boundary *and* also as centre, in that we now also understand ourselves in relation to Christ, an understanding which realises that God is for us in Christ, as our re-established centre, our new creation. (The person of Christ as source, model and goal of our new creation all figure here). We enter into this new creation by faith, faith which is also obedience to following Christ at the boundary, where we face our neighbour.

(We might note further that our participation in Christ here is a participation in his human *faithful* response to the Father through the Spirit. The same Spirit who anointed and empowered Jesus Christ in a manner enabling perfect human responsiveness moves towards us now enabling our responsiveness. Our assurance of overcoming sin rests in Christ who has provided a means to

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5 Farley defines human transcendence as an irreducibility to our concreteness (or givenness), our capacity to surpass it in modes it in awareness, criticism etc.; beyond this transcendence is the capacity "to exist self-consciously in the face of discerned possibilities and to respond to situations in the light of what is discerned". See his *Good & Evil,* p.69-70, p.159-60. The corruption of transcendence occurs when, for example, our relation to the other before us is dominated by the securing and protection of what we take to be essential aspects of our concreteness, rather than being drawn by the other in the modes of compassionate obligation, social longing and aesthetic attraction. This notion of transcendence blends well with Zizioulas' understanding of the transcendence of every natural or social exclusiveness associated for him with the realisation of an 'ecclesial hypostasis' beyond our given 'biological hypostasis'. For Zizioulas this experience is offered *par excellence* by the Eucharist. See his *Being as Communion*, pp. 59ff.

6 There are echoes here of the Levinasian theme of the face which calls forth compassionate obligation from a height. But while for Levinas this call appears to be brute phenomenonlogical reality, here the revelation of the true reality, meaning and (hopeful) destiny of our neighbour is given content in and through the narrative of Jesus Christ, presented to us pneumatologically.

attain holiness and because this can be regarded (following Irving) as being through the upholding of the humanity of the Son in the power of the Spirit, this is for human beings a *realistic* assurance and means of liberation.)[7]

Finally in this section we should recall (from Chapter 4) that the way of our participation will not be properly delineated until the places of justification and sanctification within the notion are properly understood. Participation is about the realisation of what we are to become in Christ, rooted in the primary realisation of what we are already in Christ. On this understanding our participation is initiated and sustained by our reconciliation with God in Christ, but this is a participation which we grasp intermittently and whose reality is properly responded to and glimpsed better as we conform to Christ; even so the reality will be manifest fully only eschatologically. As we conform progressively in obedience to Christ we realise, as we have stressed repeatedly, that our conforming to Christ is in fact primarily Christ conforming us to Himself and so we are referred back constantly to God's initiative (and paradigmatically to our justification), in the process of sanctification. (Barth's remark that our participation is primarily a relationship of thanks can be seen in this context as a point well-made). Only with these qualifications can we speak of degrees of participation, which is not to do with grades of achievement but with a progressive realisation and embracing of God's beneficent mercy and intention for us, despite ourselves.[8]

8.4 Causality

The issue of the way of our participation immediately raises the question of the respective influences of God and human beings in the process of participation or put another way it raises the question of causality. We have seen how Plato's thought failed to address this issue adequately (in the context of Forms and phenomena) and how Plato's thought was marked with ambiguity concerning the manner and kind of causality involved in participation. Later thinkers such

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[7] See G.McFarlane's *Christ and the Spirit. The Doctrine of the Incarnation according to Edward Irving* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1996), pp.145f, 165f and passim.

[8] This suggestion fits well with an understanding of moral and immoral acts being executed not out of sheer freedom in a vacuum but out of a background of shaping experiences and actions, out of enduring continuities and developed dispositions, inclinations and habits of behaviour. See for example the exploration of virtue in A.MacIntyre's *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology* (London: Duckworth, 1981)

as Plotinus, Augustine and Calvin share some of the same sense of ambiguity concerning (divine) causality, and all of those err towards the kind of (arbitrary) divine omni-causality which appears to crush human autonomy. Aquinas,on the other hand, following the Aristotelian assumption that effects resemble their causes, gives the impression that God cannot help but create His own likeness in His creation, a point suggesting the divine sovereignty is subject to (Aristotelian) laws of cause and effect rather than vice versa.

What is required is an understanding of causality which, in contrast, emphasises the *personal* nature of divine causality, causality which is truly causal (which we can understand by analogy with how other people cause us to do certain things and be in certain ways), but which owes more to the personal impact of receiving (and giving) love than being on the receiving end of an impersonal potentia absoluta. This kind of causality is consistent with a Creator who provides creation with space to develop in relation to Himself. A key difficulty with the language of causality is understanding how human beings can retain a contingent autonomy while yet being *caused* to respond, develop and so on. The Hegelian scheme whereby human beings were caused to contribute to the developing self-consciousness of Geist both wittingly and unwittingly smacks of manipulation for Geist's purposes which works almost despite human autonomy rather than a sustained personal nurturing of others into their fulfilled *and enduring* particularity. However the Spirit may well be that agent who can help provide the sort of causality we are looking for. It is the Spirit who mediates the Father to the Son while maintaining the Son's authentic humanity; the Spirit who is associated with the Word in the act of creation (allowing and enabling otherness) and (traditionally) the agent of resurrection (recreating, restoring otherness); it is the Spirit who leads us and creation to the teleological goal of being in God (fulfilling others). Given all of this, a developed pneumatology would seem to be the best way forward in understanding how divine personal causality can retain and transform creation's and creaturely otherness without slipping into misconceptions of divine agency as automatic, autocratic or mechanical.

Perhaps causality is not dissimilar to that causality we outlined in relation to sacramental participation. There, sacraments were understood not so much as an isolated means of grace but as a concrete way of presenting the grace of

God in Christ which 'brings home' the truth, reality and actuality of the gospel of salvation. The Spirit could be understood as orienting and relating us to this reality. While this gives an 'objective' pole to sacramental actions, an existential or subjective pole is still present because God's gift requires acceptance, the faithful receptivity of the believer, which is a question of our spirits bearing witness with the Spirit. (It is not impossible in this situation that the causal influence of the Spirit is experienced at the point of greatest felt autonomy, and this touches on the blending of freedom and 'compulsion' in Christian discipleship which we have discussed above). There are parallels here with our understanding of 'becoming what we are', affirming and entering into the new creation we are in Christ. (There is a kind of asymmetry about this kind of causality, we cannot cause it to happen but we *may* be able to undo that which has been caused and is being caused for us.)

8.5 Epistemology

Polanyi's epistemology can help us to see how knowledge of God arises within us as faithful commitment and acknowledgement of God which is a response to God's movement towards us in the Spirit as He enables us to participate in Christ, a participation involving knowledge. We have argued against understanding this knowledge as narrowly intellectual, individualistic or purely propositional. A Polanyian understanding suggests that our knowing is a personal act occurring within a given framework of beliefs, relations and idioms. There can be 'universal intent' here as explained earlier but not 'pure objective knowledge'. Participation in Christ, knowledge and ecclesial belonging require commitment and trusting faith; either we enter the 'hermeneutical circle' mentioned in Chapter 5 (commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord <-> church <-> Personal participation in Christ <-> commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord) or we do not. Only as we enter this circle does it become possible for us to realise that we are participating in Christ. Knowledge by acquaintance is primary here, although 'knowledge about' is a vital component of such knowledge. We cannot come by this 'knowledge by acquaintance' except by way of allowing Christ to take form in us, so overcoming the experience of being alienated from our 'true selves', an experience common to the Christian tradition from Paul (cf. Rom. 7:19), to Augustine, to present thought (e.g. Tillich's notion of self-

estrangement). We are in a sense committing ourselves to catching up with what we have become in Christ, with what we will be (eschatologically). The epistemology outlined here is an ontological epistemology involving as it does personal relationships, and it has ontological implications for our way of being. And this ontological epistemology, unlike that of say Aquinas, does not threaten our creaturely integrity as we come to know God better, nor does it imply that we must become other than human if we are to progress in our participation in the divine.

Discussion of participating in the knowledge of God is closely related to the issue of religious language and its authenticity. Linguistic issues concerning participation have been touched on at numerous points in our study. From Plato onwards the question arose that if a particular participates in a Form F then how are we to understand their community of character? Univocity undermined the Form's transcendence, equivocity emptied participation of intelligible content. Allen argued that the community of character might be explained by

> ..treating exemplifications not as substances in which qualities inhere but as relational entities, entities in which resemblance and dependence so combine as to destroy the possibility of substantiality. Plato's use of the metaphors of imitation and reflection, and his characterisation of particulars and Forms, indirectly indicate that he accepted this solution.[9]

But Plato (like Proclus after him and others) did not have the relational conception of substance to enable him to move from these (presumed) intuitions to a more rigorous understanding. With such a conceptualisation, resemblance and dependence might so combine not "to destroy the possibility of substantiality" but "to establish substantiality which is not con-substantiality" by nature of the qualitatively different relations involved (participatory rather than perichoretic). The issue recurred in early Christian debate, the ontological limitations of Arius suggesting finally to Athanasius that access to who and what God is in Himself are sealed from us. If however the nature of our dependent relationship with God is both the source of our (categorically different) being and of our access to God, we are able to understand our participation neither equivocally or univocally in terms of community of character but as a community in distinct character, a community where our character corresponds to our creaturely status as creatures related to our Creator. Only within the context of

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9 Allen, *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, p.60.

this relationship, where God is Subject, initiating, sustaining and fulfilling, is our language appropriate to grasp God because it is in this context that we appreciate that our words are not our property but His.

> And disposing of them as His property, He places them at our disposal - at the disposal of our grateful obedience - when He allows and commands us to make use of them in this relationship too... When we apply them to God they are not alienated from their original object and therefore from their truth, but, on the contrary, restored to it" (C.D. II.1, p.229).[10]

But even if the (partly semantic) separation between Creator and creatures is overcome by God, it is not the case that there is no longer any hiddenness about God; to assume so is immediately to assume that our knowledge of God is not due to the grace of His ongoing relationship with us. This knowledge also shares in that 'eschatological tension' which understands that we are both new creations in Christ and yet still sinners, so that provisionality and incompleteness mark both personal and propositional knowledge, life and language.

8.6 Eschatology

In distinguishing our participation in God from the intra-trinitarian relations Origen is in danger of leaving us with the possibility of further falls from our state of perfected participating being, thus undermining a sense of eschatological finality, fulfilment or completion. Gregory of Nyssa's understanding of eternal progress in our participation in God is free of the possibility of further falls but it stands in danger of undermining the eschatological vein of thought in scripture which stresses God's initiative in the completion of all things in Himself. If however we understand our progress as a continual rolling back of our own initiative apart from God, understanding ourselves to be led more and more by God and allowing this to happen, then this 'progression' (which is itself a response to God continuously dependent on God) fits more easily with an awareness of a final consummation which is entirely of God's doing. In one sense our uplifting is complete in our justification in Christ, but it remains for us to embrace this uplifting in the personal, spatio-temporal space provided by

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10 For an exploration of the theological possibility of our language containing words that in their full sense may only be used to describe God see Roger White's article 'Notes on Analogical Predication and Speaking about God', in *The Philosophical Frontiers of Theology*, eds. B.Hebblethwaite and S.R.Sutherland (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), pp197-226.

God. Participation is about this embracing, participation which does not undermine eschatology but which provides for a deeper yearning for the eschaton, when He will be all in all and finally deal with those stumbling-blocks and stubborn barriers we persistently erect to keep ourselves apart from God and one another. Why there is this spatio-temporal opportunity provided for our response prior to the eschaton is to some extent an audacious question but the beginnings of an answer may perhaps lie (as Barth suggested)[11] in the importance God gives to our human response-ability of thanks, praise and service. In the interim the church is the Body of Christ in the world, in service, witness, proclamation and mission. The historical church does not determine the nature of the eschaton here but becomes an instrument of its permeation of history, as others are brought to Christ and the Father's will is done. We saw earlier how the Eucharist is a key focus of the church's eschatological identity which empowers her to be even now what she will be. Further we have seen (in Chapter 7) how the church must engage seriously and urgently with history, as the Body of Christ which loves and seeks the well-being of sinners within and without of herself.

8.7 The Participation of Creation

The individualistic emphasis of the Platonic (and Gnostic) understandings of participation often included the dimension of escape from the realm of matter and flight from the transient temporal context in which human beings found themselves. This prejudice colours some of the early Christian understandings (e.g. elements of Augustine and Dionysius) and we might note that, while it may be that human beings have precedence over the rest of creation from God's perspective (cf. Rom. 8:31-39) there is an emphasis in Scripture on the transformation and uplifting of creation along with humanity (e.g. Rom. 7:21) and theologically one can plausibly argue that God will not allow His creation to be flawed finally but brought to fulfilment when He is "all in all". In our discussion of the Eucharist in Chapter 7 the thought of J.Zizioulas helped us to understand the Eucharist as including an anaphoric referring-back of the created realm to God, a referring-back which enables human beings to receive created gifts afresh as life-giving, a dynamic which is a part of human participation in God.

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[11] C.D. IV.1, pp.737-738

The church's giving is a giving back, and an entering into the Son's gift of the new creation in Himself to the Father. If human reverence for creation loses hold of this referring-back to God, the possibility of pantheism looms and with it an understanding of participation in creation which includes a certain solidarity, unity, holism, immediacy and spatio-temporal continuity with the world but which has nevertheless removed our Creator from the scene. A holistic grasping of one's part in the created totality is not to be reduced to a shared affinity with other creatures and objects but also with an understanding, appreciation and realisation of our common source and sustenance in God.

Zizioulas regards our referring back of creation (including ourselves) as the right exercise of our *imago Dei*, in that we were given an absolute freedom (in the sense of not being confronted with anything given) which is the *imago Dei* and which can only achieve the goal implicit within it (of survival) by bringing itself into relation with its eternal and imperishable Creator. Important for our purposes here are the points that Zizioulas seeks to retain a sense of the material realm's coming right with this approach (rather than being abandoned) and the fact that it is the image of God which is the seat of such possibilities. A further theological resource in arguing for this retention and consummation of creation is the Incarnation. For Augustine for example the centrality of the Incarnation does not rest in the fact that by it we are somehow released from the chains of corporeity and the material world but rather in the fact that in and through faith in the Incarnation we can be liberated from our sinful self-referring absorption in the material realm and be re-ordered towards God without our being in the material realm *necessarily* abrogating such a re-ordering. But the incarnation was not simply about God assuming *material* form but God assuming *human* form and this provides some weight to the view that human beings be accorded a certain priority and responsibility for creation. In Gregory of Nyssa we found the idea that through human beings authentically executing their delegated authority over creation, creation is 'lifted up' to partake of the divine glory, being transfigured in the process. Undergirding such an idea would appear to be the hierarchy of levels we see first in Platonic thought, but whereas in Platonic thought the aim is to ascend through the distinct levels, here creation, creature and Creator retain their distinctiveness while the former are fulfilled in realising relations to the Creator (in Christ through the Spirit) appropriate to their createdness. Thus we can begin to see how creation might

participate in God insofar as right relatedness to God is restored and insofar as creation retains its (dependent, derived) distinctiveness from God. Pantheism is avoided because the fulfilment of creation is rooted in relations respective of difference - the triune relations, the relation of God and human being in Christ, of the Spirit and human spirits - and therefore its fulfilment need not necessarily be seen as a question of assimilation but more of consummation of its particularity in relatedness to the Otherness of the Triune God. The mediation of God's loving will for creation through the Son and Spirit and the manner of this mediation (enabling space for other (human) persons) at least provides grounds for positing the transformation of the cosmos without its deification or destruction.

8.8 The Image of God and Deification

While theologians such as Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine use the language of deification in writing of human participation in God, it is clear from the foregoing discussions of their thought that a key strand in the patristic tradition understands this not to mean abandoning parameters appropriate to our dependent, derived existence as creatures but as implying the glorification of our humanity as embodied in the humanity of Jesus Christ. Our sympathies lie with an understanding of *theosis* akin to that which D.F.Winslow finds in the thought of Gregory of Nazianzus and also found in other Fathers; "*theosis* describes our progressive growth towards an adopted dignity of fulfilled creatureliness"[12]. (How far the various Patristic theologians succeed in presenting this kind of theosis coherently and consistently is, as we have seen, a moot point, but it is this strand of the tradition that we seek to support and build on). One reason why the doctrine of the Image of God has been important in Christian theological thought is that the understanding of human creatures as being in the image of God enables Origen, Gregory and Augustine (for example) to explain how it is that the possibility of participation in God is open to human beings. For Origen participation proceeds from image through likeness to unity while for Gregory the image of God which is our capacity for participation in God is likened to a mirror[13] which increasingly reflects God as

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[12] See his *The Dynamics of Salvation: A Study in Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), p.179.

[13] The idea of "image" as in a reflection in a mirror has the positive advantages of communicating God's initiative and human beings' ongoing dependence for the *imago Dei*. Negatively (rather like the use of "transparency" to explain the image of God), this picture is impersonal and perhaps overstresses human passivity.

the human being participates progressively in God. (For Gregory, what enables our participation is our rational nature together with our freedom - qualities akin to God's qualities, and qualities such as these go to make the image of God within us and enable us to partake of the divine goodness.) Again for Augustine the image of God provides our capacity for participating in God and in *De Trinitate* this participation proceeds through a discovery of the image of God within us which points on to the Trinity itself. Behind some of these conceptualisations we can see aspects of the Platonic understanding of participation as resembling or imaging. As previously pointed out, Plato's thought provides space for understanding the original and image as belonging to different ontological categories, regarding the properties of the participant as grounded in the relation to that which is imaged. Again the (Neoplatonic) theme of progressive (ontological, intellectual and ethical) ascent can be seen in the way in which progress proceeds through image to likeness, and this theme is only adequately transposed into a Christian key by those Fathers (such as Irenaeus) who do not finally dissolve "image" into the "likeness" Christ has but who retain the dependent, derived, distinct status of the human image on the Incarnate prototype which is related to the image without absorbing it.

But *what* is the image of God? It has to be said that there is no *consensum patrum* on this issue, although freedom, reason, human nature as spirit and person, have often been used to describe the image. All we can do here is provide some pointers to what an understanding of the image of God should involve and note some dangers to be avoided. One danger is that of losing the ongoing nature of dependent relationship with our Creator, a relationship in which alone for example knowledge of God is imparted by the Subject of such knowledge Himself (and having a communal referent). For example Augustine's approach might suggest that by sober self-knowledge we recognize that we are an "image" and that we therefore proceed from this God-given similarity to God. This in turn might be argued to be an example of the *analogia entis*, understood as an assumption of correspondence between creaturely being and divine being by which creatures participate directly (epistemologically at least) in that divine being. We would react against this *analogia entis* if it suggested a route to God *apart* from God because insofar as our image involves a particular relationship to God, discovery of who we are is inextricably connected both with

who God is and with God's gracious initiative in revealing the relation in which we stand to Him. However, insofar as the *analogia entis* implies that God has really given human creatures a reality *separate* though related to Himself we would not gainsay it. Any *analogia entis* must be situated within an understanding of our relationship to God as mediated by God and thus it must be situated within an *analogia fidei*.[14]

Barth's thought provides very concrete ways of understanding and exercising the imago Dei in our inter-human relating and his thought resists a second danger related to the first, that of assuming the image of God to be some sort of innate, realisable capacity of human beings potentially (perhaps eschatologically) independent of our Creator. The four essential characteristics of "Being in Encounter" listed by Barth and discussed earlier are humanity's appropriate response to the revelation of Christ at the inter-human level, because in this way human beings participate in the history of the encounter and interaction of God with humanity in Jesus Christ and humankind images the Image of God, Jesus Christ. In seeing, hearing and speaking, assisting and relating with gladness we are involved in a process of mirroring and imaging in which others come to know themselves both through us and in the process of mirroring/imaging us to ourselves, and vice versa. Barth avoids the idea of the imago Dei being some sort of innate capacity of human beings, it is rather an analogy of (abiding) relationship. There is progression though, as our relationships more adequately conform to the relationships we image. This process is a process of becoming in which we become who we are called in Jesus Christ to be. The reformation of the Imago Dei includes both a participation in the knowledge of a God who is for us in Christ and a participation in Christ's being-for-others in the creaturely sphere. And this being-for-others extends to enabling others to come to acknowledge that God is for them, so sweeping them up into participation in the Triune life as they realise their election and respond by obeying and serving God in Christ. While our freedom, love and being for God and others correspond and are similar to the Trinitarian dynamics, they are reflections not suggestive of any ontological parity between human creatures and God.

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[14] This approach circumvents two major difficulties for those who advocate the *analogia entis*;1. that it might separate the knowledge of God from God as the Subject of that knowledge and 2. relatedly, that it might suggest a less than radical dependence of the human being on God for his/her being and becoming.

Barth's approach also avoids individualising our understanding of human beings, seeing the imago Dei as completely defined by reference to the individual (and God alone). Forms of Christianity heavily indebted to the Neoplatonic school face this possibility. Against this inclination, according to Calvin we 'exercise' the image of God within us in the sense that we follow God's pattern of extending His grace to the world as we reach out to our neighbours. And through this action we come more to realise that which has been wrought in us as we become what we are in Christ. Following Calvin's insight means also that we are prohibited from focusing attention on our "God-given" similarity to God in the imago Dei in any way which might miss the fact of its being grounded on God's downward motion of grace. Calvin links the 'horizontal' and 'vertical' dimensions of participation in God in a way which steers a course between ethical indifference and Pelagianism. But while participation is conceived here as activity which mirrors the divine activity Calvin is careful to assert that there is a 'natural' (i.e. created) character to the image of God so that this image is not crystallised purely as or out of a dynamic ecstasis towards others, see *Institutes* I.xv.3 for example. We would add that this created character is to be relationally conceived, in that human beings are born into specific patterns of relatedness which go part of the way to defining who they are. We are reminded at this point of the Cappadocian grasp of relation as qualifying persons ontologically and if our human relationships have ontological implications (constitutive implications building on God's originary creative act and involving God in that constitution), then the vital nature of such relations becomes apparent. Hence the importance of the church is also apparent, in providing a network of relatedness based on, sustained by and oriented towards God. It is the weakness of some formulations of the *imago Dei* that they fail to take account of the essential importance of relationship with fellow human beings and often underlying this is a questionable ontology a little too indebted to the (Neo)platonists, - we saw that Augustine was a case in point.[15]

One consideration in understanding the *reformation* of the image of God

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15 The fact that Genesis 1-2 incorporates both the individual and relational aspects of the doctrine of the image of God might be a starting-point for ensuring that any such doctrine includes both emphases, rather than allowing one to assimilate or predominate over the other. The individual particularity and contingent autonomy of our humanity must be asserted along with the constitutive nature of our relations if we are to be true to Genesis 1-2 and avoid either individualism or the dissolution of our particularity in all its personal spaciousness.

concerns how far we effectively become like Christ as the reformation is realised and how far Christ becomes irrelevant as our participation proceeds. The role of Christ is often associated with the reformation of the image of God and/or its capacity for participation in God, as for example Gregory and Augustine make clear. The uniqueness of Christ is retained better by those theologians who more explicitly distinguish the Son of God's relation to the Father from our relation to the Godhead[16] and better still by those who do not show tendencies to see Christ's work as an impersonal reformation of the universal form of humanity in which all automatically participate. Participation in God is understood as being enabled by Christ but if Christ is not understood both in terms of his work and his person then Christ might easily be left behind as participation progresses (a danger Origen's thought faces). Without a sustaining, enabling relationship to the person of Christ as participation develops the scriptural stress on the ongoing relationship with Christ is lost as is the experience of generations of Christians of a living, nourishing relationship with Christ which draws them more deeply into knowledge and love of God. One way in which this ongoing relationship can be understood is in terms of our continuing dependence on Christ as we move towards God, and this suggests that the reformation of the image of God is not a once-for-all operation but is itself a dynamic, developing reformation rooted in a relationship to God through Jesus Christ, an understanding close to that of Gregory's.

Finally, it is important to retain a sense of human particularity in the process (*pace* Hegel) of the reformation of the image of God and in participation and here we must stress the pneumatological dimension of the process. Just as the Spirit mediates the action of God the Father to God the Son in such a way as to maintain Jesus' particular humanity, so too the Spirit can be regarded as that person of the Trinity concerned with establishing communion between beings that are opposed or separate in a manner which keeps the space for individuals to be human in all their particularity. Hegel's pneumatology failed to preserve human particularity finally and serves as a warning to understand the Spirit's function as derived from God's self-revelation in Christ, a self-revelation in which Christ's authentic humanity is retained. (One might argue that by

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16 John Damascene for example distinguishes between the Son's imaging of the Father *kata physin* and that of human beings *kata thesin* (artefact-artist), a distinction having Platonic and Aristotelian roots. See John Damascene, *De imaginibus*, or 3, 18 (PG 94, 1337D-40B) A further example is Origen in *D.P.*1.2.6

sublating humanity in higher syntheses Hegel failed to grasp the importance of the Ascension of Christ, which in part indicates the eternal nature of Christ's human-ness in all its particularity). Further, the Spirit does not merely underline human uniqueness but also evokes ecstasis toward God and neighbour. (One cannot separate the Spirit from Jesus Christ here in discussing the motivation towards ecstasis; the Spirit bears witness with our spirits to the person of Christ outside us, beckoning us and yet also that one who is so close to us and in whom we recognise our true selves that he is in a sense within us. But while we cannot then separate Christ and the Spirit in enabling ecstasis, perhaps we might stress their different (if mutually supportive) functions of evoking (cf. the Spirit) and provoking (cf. Christ) our ecstasis.) Bonhoeffer comments that the Spirit acts by making us aware of the personal Other, in particular Christ; the Spirit elicits a decision from us concerning that which is Other, and with the Spirit there is a "continuous substitution of the principle of self-sacrifice on behalf of another for the natural drive of self-interest and dominance".[17] This dynamic of ecstasis corresponds to God's 'overflowing' for the sake of that which is other (i.e. creation), a dynamic in which we are caught up into the Trinitarian relations, participating in God and imaging God. We mentioned earlier the enabling role of the Spirit in bringing about our participation in Christ, that Spirit who enables us to commit ourselves to Christ and whose presence may be such that we are only tacitly aware of Him. Our awareness of the Spirit develops as we are focused on Christ, as we understand the Spirit in His relation to Christ and as we are oriented towards Christ by the Spirit.

In summary then we would argue that "image" not be taken as implying an external imprint received by human beings in the beginning and preserved by human nature as its own property independently of its relationships with God. Rather "image" implies relationship with God, so that it is never merely a created gift but a letting-be in relation to God. "Image" is not to be individualistically conceived, but involves corporate horizontal relations as well as ongoing 'vertical' dependence; it retains human creaturely particularity and integrity, distinguishes and relates Christ and human beings and is not to be narrowly conceived as involving a number of human faculties but as involving the human being in his/her totality of faculties, being and relationships.

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[17] John V.Taylor, *The Go-Between God* (London: SCM, 1972), p.109

8.9 Participation in the Life of the Trinity

To see our participation as a participation in the Godhead rather than somehow external to the inner divine life bears witness to scriptural indications of the former (e.g. Jn. 14:23) and also emphasises the longed-for intimacy of God towards his human creatures. Further if the history of Jesus Christ relates in a meaningful way to the life of the triune God then it is presumably true that our sharing in that history in some sense implies a participation in the life of the Trinity. Quite in what sense remains to be fleshed out.

Barth's understanding of the history of Jesus Christ as the external manifestation and repetition of the intra-divine history (see e.g. C.D. III.2, p.66) is provocative and has three difficulties immediately pertinent to our discussion. First it gives the impression of a God less than personally engaged with His creation, a God who has already worked out in His inner divine history all that comes to pass in the world ad extra. On the other hand Barth's thought avoids the danger that the Lord of all things is history, not God - a possibility which arises if God is in any way beholden to history. Second and relatedly, a notion of a personal, loving relationship of Creator to creature is difficult to imagine on Barth's understanding because the possibility of genuine, variable responsiveness on God's part seems to be ruled out by an almost predestinarian view of God's activity ad extra.[18] On the other hand if we assume that the history of Jesus Christ is in some sense the *actual* history of the triune God we may stand in danger of the Hegelian error of seeing creation as necessary to God's being and/or self-becoming. Thirdly the notion of repetition may undermine the (scripturally attested) communion of Father, Son and Holy

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[18] Perhaps due care in understanding the term 'repetition' can help Barth's case. Repetition need not entail *identical* events/activities/relations and indeed in a sense cannot "because what is repeated, has been, otherwise it could not be repeated, but the fact that it has been, makes repetition into the new".(A.Melberg, *Theories of Mimesis*, p.136.) Further, God's relationship to creation *must* be somehow different from the immanent relationships within the Trinity given the distinctiveness of God from creation. Repetition could be used to stress that the self-constituting intra-trinitarian relationality is strikingly reflected in the relationship of God to creation. Further, Kierkegaard's view of repetition is useful in demonstrating the complex and paradoxical nature of the relation between past and present; " the temporal device of "repetition" is a paradoxical movement between past and present; between time as instantaneous point or break or interruption; and time as process of past into present. Kierkegaardian "repetition" tries to keep these divergent dimensions of time together in one movement - making "repetition" into a non-concept or a paradoxical concept negating the presence it suggests; or a non-concept related to Plato's *to exaiphnes* in *Parmenides* - "this strange instantaneous nature, this something patched between movement and standstill and that does not exist in any time" (156DE)..". Ibid., p.141.

Spirit, that pattern of relationships which we have already seen can be understood as the very context of human participation in God.[19] Avoiding such difficulties is crucial if we are to retain the personal, relational God of Christianity, the sovereign freedom and transcendence of our Creator and human freedom, and the scene of participation itself.

One way forward might be to follow Von Balthasar in understanding our relationship with God to be analogous to that of the Father and the Son, *patterned on* that relationship and all the modalities contained within it. This allows for genuine human freedom and retains a certain divine immutability, in that the modalities of relationship taken up with God are part of the eternal modalities of the Father-Son relationship. We can even speak of affecting God in terms of 'introducing' modalities into the divine life which would not otherwise be there but these are modalities which reflect richer, deeper corresponding modalities already present in the Father-Son relationship. The modalities within the immanent Trinity which are reflected in the economic Trinity's relations with the world are rooted by Balthasar (following Bulgakov) in the originary self-generation of the Godhead:

> the Father's self-utterance in the generation of the Son is an initial "kenosis" which underpins all subsequent kenosis...The Father must not be thought to exist "prior" to this self-surrender (in an Arian sense): he *is* this movement of self-giving that holds nothing back. This divine act that brings forth the Son, that is, the second way of participating in (and of being) the identical Godhead, involves the positing of an absolute, infinite "distance" that can contain and embrace all the other distances that are possible within the world of finitude, including the distance of sin.[20]

The Father refuses to be God for Himself alone and

> ..lets go of his divinity and, in this sense, manifests a (divine) God-lessness (of love, of course). The latter must not be confused with the godlessness that is found within the world, although it

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[19] A.J.Torrance makes a forceful criticism of Barth in noting how his model of revelation, with its stress on the confrontational divine *Ich* who directly addresses the human subject and his preference for terms such as *Seinsweisen* over persons leads him to underplay the foundational importance of interpreting the divine unity and identity in terms of perichoretic communion. Barth prefers to stress the singular identity of the free divine subject, an emphasis which neglects the personal relatedness and mutuality found at the heart of the Trinitarian God. See his *Persons in Communion*, esp. pp.104-105, 218-221.

[20] H.Von Balthasar, *Theodrama*, vol.IV, p.323. The space which Balthasar posits in God does not imply ontological separation because of the love within the Godhead which allows infinite otherness without detriment to unity. Divine love "has the power freely to unfold its richness in such different modalities that the Son's experience of opposition in a hostile sense remains always a function and an aspect of his loving relationship to the Father in the Holy Spirit". O'Hanlon, ibid., p.119 Whether this experience of hostile opposition could rightly be said to include sin is questionable however.

undergirds it, renders it possible and goes beyond it.[21]

The Son's response is an eternal thanksgiving as selfless as the Father's original self-surrender, a self-giving so complete "that the Son's mission to the point of the cross is already contained within his procession from the Father and what it involves, and is a modality of that procession".[22] The Spirit here is the Father and Son's subsistent "We"; "as the essence of love, he maintains the infinite difference between them, seals it and, since he is the one Spirit of them both, bridges it".[23]

For Balthasar then the modalities of relatedness between God and the world are already provided for and in a sense contained in the inner-divine distance. From this we can see the centrality of the Father-Son relation as analogy for our relationship with the Trinitarian God for Balthasar, a relationship which can be understood as participation in the life of the Trinity in that we enter into modalities of the relating of Father and Son. Behind this Balthasar is rejecting the notion, common to much Process theology, that God can 'grow' in experience, knowledge etc., through his relation to the world. For Balthasar, as O'Donnell points out,

..creatures cannot add anything to God's Being since God is already infinite fullness. This is the element of truth in the classical conception of divine immutability[24] .

However this approach needs further thought because our participation stands in danger of vanishing into the modalities of the Father-Son's relating, our particularity and value might dissipate if we become merely a faint echo of the amplified relating of the divine persons to one another. We need at this point to recall God's assertion of the distinctiveness of the human being in the Incarnation and throughout His dealings with His people, an assertion affirming the integrity of human beings, their history and development, while yet seeking their fulfilment in relation to Himself. Our relatedness to the Trinity does not rest on a weak mimicking of the relations of the persons of the Trinity but in a

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21 Ibid., p.324

22 G.F.O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), pp.37-38

23 *Theodrama*, ibid., p.324

24 J.O'Donnell, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar* in "Outstanding Christian Thinkers"series (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992), p.70.

corresponding dynamic appropriate to the quidditas of our humanity, reflecting such modalities in ways appropriate to our creatureliness.

In fleshing out our participation in the Trinity here reflection on the humanity of Jesus Christ becomes important because if Christ's humanity participates in the divine life then we can perhaps understand our participation in the Trinity (in part) as proceeding analogously to that of Christ's involvement in the divine life. We noted earlier Calvin's implicit suggestion that our participation in the humanity of Christ *is* our participation in the life of the Triune God, an identification which depends for its force on the fact that our participation in Christ implies that we share in the same love of the Father for the Son and, empowered by the Spirit, reciprocate this love in our filial obedience to the Father.[25] The participation of the human Jesus in the Trinity is one which is inseparable from the Son's involvement in the inner divine life, including obedient humility and humble obedience, joyful self-giving and thankful service. Our participation in the divine life is a correspondent obedience, humility and thankfulness, a corresponding service which participates in Christ's service. At this point Balthasar's understanding of participation as participation in mission (cf. Jn. 20:21) is relevant:

> Participation in Christ's mission and form of existence, a participation that bridges the permanent difference between him and us, is possible when a believer is ready through the assent of faith to receive and live his existence as mission.[26]

Faith here is not centred on the Lutheran conception of faith as security but rather involves a complete existential surrender to Christ, and Balthasar's understanding is inspired by Philippians 3; "One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward goal of God in Christ Jesus". But if faith is an act of expropriation centred on Christ, trustful, risky and existing only in flight towards Christ, it is also obedience for Balthasar. As O'Donnell comments,

> Just as Christ's form was his abiding openness to the will of the Father, so the Christian's being, informed by Christ, consists in his radical availability to do the will of the Father. Here we see again

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25 However some precision is required in assessing just how far we "share" the "same" love and obedience and it is arguable that there is a greater dissimilarity in the similarity where our love and obedience is concerned vis a vis the inner Trinitarian love and (filial) obedience. (See the earlier section on 'Freedom').

26 Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Spiritus Creator* (Einsiedeln, 1967), p.309

that the form of faith will always be Marian, the receptivity to let God do in me what he will.[27]

Our obedience finds concrete expression for Balthasar in our particular missions, those existential tasks received from and in Christ. Reception of this mission enables the human being as image of God (Abbild) to conform more and more to his likeness (Urbild), philosophically it enables the *Geistessubjekt* (spiritual subject) to become a person[28] (as one hears oneself called an "I" by a "Thou") and it enables one to realise who one is and why one has been created. The particularity of each individual's mission emphasises the eternal election of each individual, who is known by God with a particular love and has a particular mission which s/he alone can fulfill. (For Balthasar this mission is tied to the ecclesial community in that Christ lets the church be by creating members, inserting them into his reality and giving each member a particular missio[29].) Our missio participates in Christ's missio and Christ's mission is not in any sense to be separated from the inner divine life; indeed Balthasar states that "the mystery of the Son's mission in the world is a purely Trinitarian mystery"[30]. The Son's *missio* is in a sense contained within His *processio*, or as Balthasar describes it in considering Christ's atonement,

the Son's *missio* is his *processio* extended in "economic" mode; but whereas in his *processio* he moves toward the Father in receptivity and gratitude, in his *missio* (thanks to the "Trinitarian inversion") he moves away from him and toward the world, into the latter's ultimate darkness. In fact, since all is obedience, he is moving toward the Father through this utter estrangement, but for the present he must not be allowed to know this.[31]

Our participation in the life of the Trinity can be seen to proceed through our faithful, obedient appropriation of our mission, our vocation. In this way we share in Christ's *missio* which is itself the "economic" aspect of the Son's

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27 John O"Donnell, 'Hans Urs Von Balthasar:The Form of his Theology', in *Communio*, vol. XVI, no.3 (Fall 1989), p.472

28 Behind this understanding of human personhood lies Balthasar's understanding of Christ as person *par excellence* in being wholly receptive and thankfully self-giving in his obedient openness to the Father's mission. Certain Johannine texts carry particular weight for Balthasar, texts stressing Jesus' obedience to his heavenly Father, cf. Jn. 4:34, 6:38, 8:28.

29 "..every grace also implies a mission (illustrated by the way baptism and confirmation belong together); and this mission has both a qualitative, personalising and socialising effect". Balthasar, *Theodrama*, Vol.III, 349.

30 Balthasar, *Christlicher Stand* (Einsiedeln, 1977), p.149

31 Balthasar, *Theodrama* Vol. IV, p.356. Elsewhere Balthasar clarifies the term "Trinitarian inversion"; "What we have termed "inversion" is ultimately only the projection of the immanent Trinity onto the "economic" plane, whereby the Son's "correspondence" to the Father is articulated as "obedience"." *Theodrama*, Vol. III, p.191

processio from the Father, a *processio* involving filial thanksgiving, receptivity and obedient self-giving. Our human *missio* is our concrete participation in Jesus Christ *and* our participation within the Trinitarian life for Balthasar.[32] To see the full Trinitarian force of this understanding we should clarify the Spirit's place in our participation. What opens the Godhead to us according to Balthasar is the Holy Spirit, who processes from the love of the Father and the Son, being both the bond of their union and the opening of their love to the world (rather like a child within marriage). The Spirit manifests to the earthly Jesus the Father's will and only in the power of the Spirit is Jesus so radically open to the Father's will, ready to face even the human failure of his mission on the Cross and entrust his mission's completion to the Spirit after the Resurrection. Similarly our sense of mission is mediated by the Spirit (beginning with baptism), the Spirit of freedom and obedience, mediating the Christian's particular way of letting himself/herself be moulded by the archetypal figure of Christ, a letting-be ordered on obedience to the Father. At the same time the Spirit respects the distinction of believers and Christ, for this is the same Spirit who allows the Father and the Son to remain distinct and yet be joined in an unbreakable bond of love.

There is one particularly pressing issue raised by this explication of human participation in God. To speak of our participation in the life of the Trinity brings us up against the problem of two traditions of thought concerning God and how they interact; that of the 'philosophical tradition', God the 'necessary, immutable, uncaused, omnipotent, eternal, omnipresent, omniscient and in every sense perfect' One[33]; and that of God as personal agent, the loving, merciful, righteous, faithful God of much of the Bible, tradition and human experience. In relation to participation, it is not immediately apparent how for example an eternal, immutable God is able to enable the sharing of temporal, mutable beings in His Godhead in ways involving personal loving relations. The issue is one which we encounter throughout our historical discussion of participation, right back to Plato whose two notions of participation (as 'sharing in a part of' and resemblance) reflect an analogous issue between the immanence and

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[32] *Missio* for Balthasar appears to encompass all those divinely inspired actions in which we move out of ourselves towards God and others in freedom and love. Thus our *missio* is an ecstasis which includes sacramental, ecclesial and ethical components and which is as much (for example) a participation in Christ's priesthood as it is a participation in Christ's prophetic ministry.

[33] C.Schwoebel, *God: Action and Revelation* (Kampen: Kok Pharos,1992), p.50

transcendence of the Forms, an issue he finally left unresolved. We shall draw our study to a close with a discussion of this issue followed by a summary of our overall conclusions.

Augustine's approach, focused on temporality and eternity, was to insert our human time into God's own time, and Balthasar following Augustine, wrote that "the extended structure of time can only be dissolved vertically, by being reinfolded in the freedom of transcending love"[34]. What this means exactly is difficult to fathom, but it reveals the intuition that the solution for Augustine and Balthasar is Christological:

> Christ descends into time and redeems our time from within. Since Jesus is the divine Logos made flesh, every moment of his existence is filled with eternity. Time is no longer futile.[35]

(Balthasar regards Jesus as embracing even the 'no time' of hell in his Holy Saturday descent to the realm of the dead).

One difficulty with Balthasar's approach is the distance Balthasar seems to assume between creation and created time and the Godhead. Phrases such as *Christ descends into time* lull one into thinking of God's own time as operating 'above' and perhaps parallel to created time, so that after a certain 'divine time' the Godhead enters our time in Jesus Christ. The truth of this way of thinking is that God is not bound by created time, but there is no sense in which time is 'outside' God if by that we mean unrelated to the personal reality of God. Again Balthasar's use of Bulgakov's understanding of the *processio of the Son from the Father* gives the unmistakable impression that the self-generation of the Godhead is dominated by (an originally Platonic) cause-effect model.[36] It might be argued that this model indicates logical rather than temporal priority[37] but this already suggests the necessity of a modification of this model of *processio* so that God is not understood as being subject to some kind of external time constraints analogous to created time's structure. Perhaps it is not that this

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34 Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Man in History* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1967), p.19.

35 J.O'Donnell, *Balthasar*, pp.147-8

36 Zizioulas, following the Cappadocians, appears to err in this direction with his understanding of the Father as "the "cause" both of the generation of the Son and of the procession of the Spirit". See his *Being as Communion*, p.41

37 Cyril of Alexandria for one was nervous of any language akin to cause-effect terminology where the Trinitarian persons were concerned because the (often-assumed) implication of the superiority of cause over effect might introduce a creeping subordinationism. See his *Dialogus de Trinitate*, J.P.Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca*, 75.721, 744.

model is incorrect so much as inadequate if it does not stand alongside a model which stresses the pneumatological *drawing out* of the Father's intentions, 'retroactively' focusing the Father's aims and even crystallising those goals, whose 'achievement ' is the Son[38]. Taken together these two models imply that the Son is as much pneumatologically constituted as paternally caused. To these two models a third might tentatively be added, emphasising the Son's actualisation of the Father in and through the Spirit; there is no Father without the Son, who realises the Father's will in con-stituting (with the Holy Spirit) the Father's will through obedience. This third model is especially controversial as it could be taken as undermining the Father's *priority*, but the divine taxis as discerned through the narrative of Jesus Christ which gives content to such priority can still be retained on this understanding.[39] Further, this model is not to be taken in isolation. All three models are flawed if understood separately in the context of a temporality akin to the fixed past/present/future structure of created time but then again this is their virtue; that we can only understand these models together as they are subversive of being assimilated to some framework mirroring created time's structure. These models taken together stress the mutual co-constitution of the Godhead and it is this very action which, in its infinite variety and depth, gives sense to talk of God's time.[40] Created time can be understood within this time, God's gracious making room for creation within His triune life. Our participation in the Godhead depends on our sharing in this dynamic of co-constitution, not in the sense that we contribute to God's self-generation but in that primarily we allow this dynamic co-constitution to mould our way of being. Thus for example we participate in the relatedness of Father and Son as we allow our *missio* in Christ to correspond more closely to Christ's

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38 "If the Father is shown as "begetting" the Son and "breathing" the Spirit, the Spirit will be shown as "liberating" the Father and "achieving" the Son". R.W.Jenson, *Unbaptized God,* p.139.

39 What is undermined by this approach is the idea that the *Monarchia* is limited to one Person. We join with Gregory of Nazianzus, Calvin, T.F.Torrance and others in insisting that the whole Trinity and not just the Father is the *arche* of the Oneness of the Godhead; the Trinity is to be conceived as three Persons distinguished "not in status, but in position; not in substance but in form, not in power but in sequence". See Calvin's *Institutes* I.xiii.26. Elsewhere Calvin seems to suggest that the divine taxis is an accommodation to our human ways of contemplating God, *Institutes* I.xiii.18. Our speculative attempt to put flesh on this shared *Monarchia* is with a view to shedding light on our participation in the Godhead, but such speculation is rejected by some scholars as both unnecessary and inevitably fruitless; "We cannot know *what* God is in his One Being, for as such the Being of God is utterly beyond all finite comprehension; nor can we ever know *how* God is One Being, Three Persons, for that is beyond all finite explanation. But we may know *who* God is, for he has made *himself* personally known to us through the Incarnation of his Son, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit". T.F.Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives*, p.142.

40 This assumes that time and events are not mutually extrinsic.

missio from the Father (faith, obedience, love) and this is a participation in the *processio* of the Spirit. We participate in the relation of Spirit and Father as we are obedient to the Father in the power of the Spirit, so constituting the Body of Christ (church). Finally we participate in the relation of Spirit and Christ, sharing in the establishment of the Father's will as we allow ourselves to be conformed to Christ through the Holy Spirit (e.g. fruits of the Spirit). These are participations in which ours is a responsive activity based on a prior receptivity to God which is itself God's gift. These dynamics are inter-related and as we share in them our time becomes God's time (e.g. the realised nature of eternal life in John's Gospel, Jn. 6:54, 68, 17:3).

The intra-trinitarian relationships are outside of created time and within time in that created time is *within* God, the mode they assume within time being the personal, loving, merciful, just kind of relationships which Scripture describes. Yet these are the same relationships which are for example immutable (in that they are not ruled by temporal change to the extent of *damaging* this perichoresis), impassible (in that they are not impacted from outside in ways affecting their *co-constituting* nature) and omnipotent (in being *governed* by no power beyond these relationships). Precisely because these relationships have these qualities the persons of the Trinity are able to engage with humanity and creation in personal ways appropriate to humanity without endangering either the integrity of the Godhead or the security of creation's consummation. The question then arises as to the relationship between events in the life of Christ and those within the life of the immanent Trinity. Can these be argued to be one and the same, so that for example "the resurrection of Jesus was the *executing* of the triune God's unity with himself"[41] or are they somehow separate? The difficulty with identification is the Hegelian danger of assuming the necessity of creation for God's self-constitution.[42] The difficulty with separation is that it would raise again the question of the authenticity and personal nature of God's engagement with creation. Perhaps we can answer this by still retaining the separation of the immanent trinity's constitution and the economic Trinity's 'self-

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41 R.W.Jenson, *Unbaptized God*, p.140

42 A further potential difficulty with identification is the contingency of historical events, contingencies which suggest God risks Himself in bringing creation to its appropriate consummation; e.g. God's " identity with himself must truly be *at risk* as Moses and Pharaoh struggle or as Jesus dies". R.W.Jenson, *Unbaptized God*, p.140. Such a risk might be regarded as ultimate love, but it might also be regarded as ultimate recklessness given that creation's only hope rests in God as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier!

repetition' for creation's sake. Might it not be possible to argue that God is indeed personally involved in (for example) the history of Jesus Christ in a passible, mutable way in being affected by creation (e.g. in ways not utterly dissimilar to human emotions such as anger, disappointment etc.) but not in a manner destructive of the essential, mutually constituting relationships of the Trinitarian persons? The narrative of Good Friday indicates the profound effect of humanity's rejection of God on both the Father and the Son, while Easter Day indicates that the Triune relations are 'still' actively co-constituting. God's involvement is genuine but there is a quite proper refusal of God to risk His very being, *out of love* for creation, in that only as God remains God does creation's hoped for consummation remain possible. Much more would need to be said of course about the nature of God's passibility and mutability but this offers one possible way forward.[43]

8.10 Conclusion

To conclude, the Classical conception of participation carries certain dangers when understood in relation to God. Anti-materialism, individualism, intellectual elitism and denial of particularity are some such dangers. Our study has led us

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[43] One further question for example is whether the 'preexisting God-man Jesus Christ' (cf. Barth, C.D. II.2, p.110) is envisaged as humanly preexistent prior to the Incarnation or not. One solution to this dilemma is Küng's viewing of the humanity of God under the dual aspects *sub specie temporis* and *sub specie aeternitatis*. From our perspective one cannot speak of a pre-temporal Jesus whereas, from God's eternal perspective on past, present and future, the human Jesus is always with God as the elected one and as the Lord of time. "This is 'the realm of eternity. It is impossible to speak simply in the strict sense of a non-incarnate logos'. While God is God without humanity, he wills to be God with humanity, so that there is 'a single and indivisible knowledge through which he knows himself as the one who freely became man in the Son. Hence the eternal Logos knows himself as Logos only by knowing himself simultaneously as incarnate; and only as Logos incarnate is the eternal Logos known also by the Father and the Holy Spirit." See John Thompson's article "Jüngel on Barth", in *The Possibilities of Theology: Studies in the Theology of Eberhard Jüngel in his Sixtieth Year* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), p.167 A potential problem with this view is that it stands in danger of eternalising all the events of Christ's life from a divine perspective, so that Jesus' agony is eternal, as is Holy Saturday, as is His birth. But the sense in which we relate to the risen Jesus as human is given substance by the *completed* nature of his life, death and resurrection, not by the everlasting presence of the events which make up the narrative of his human life. Put another way, the Ascension has already happened in the life of God. This problem can be addressed by recalling Boethius' point that the presence to God of all time is due to God's primacy rather than being a property of time. If God has all time present to mind, this need not entail all time is timelessly actual. John Simons argues "that the eternal now may be conceived on the model of the conscious present in respect of the co-presence of simultaneity and succession, so that it is not unreasonable to think of all temporal events present to God both in their unchanging order and in their unfolding succession". See his 'Eternity, Omniscience and Temporal Passage: A Defence of Classical Theism', *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 42, No. 3, p.567

to suggest an understanding of participation based more on the scriptural pointers to a Christian notion of participation, particularly those ways of conceiving the term found in Paul's letters. Our participation in God is rooted in God's participation in our human condition in the person of Christ. Ontologically our relationship with God has been transformed by dint of Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension and it remains for us to affirm fully the new creation we are in Christ, or as God relates to us in Christ through the Holy Spirit. (This participation is distinguished from the perichoretic relations of the Trinitarian persons, the latter involving mutual constitution, the former suggestive of (ongoing) dependence). Our freedom to affirm our new creation in Christ is a freedom whose possibility is realised through the initiating action of God and whose exercise is primarily God's conforming of ourselves to Himself in Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. (Thus participation is about sharing in that human-Godward movement we find archetypally given in the Son's relation to the Father in the Spirit.) Such participation is implicit in our creation (which is also our election), and in fact this aspect (or tier) of participation is symbolised in baptism, where our initial passivity and God's prior activity provide the ground for our correspondent participatory response to His creation, election and redemption of human beings. Thus two tiers of participation can be distinguished (though they must not be severed from one another). Participation covers both justification and sanctification on this view, both being rooted in the person and work of Christ and thus giving continuity to our being and becoming. Our active participation in God is our participation in God's encounter with the world and in particular this involves active membership of the church, Christ's body. Sacramental, ethical, epistemological and ecclesial dimensions to our participation are all essential and go together as we realise ourselves ever more closely to be the human beings God seeks us to be in (relation to Himself through the Spirit in) Christ. Such an approach does not undermine eschatology because, as we have seen, it is possible to understand progressive participation as a continual rolling back of our initiative apart from God, recognising and reconciling ourselves more and more to God's loving movement towards us and in us, a movement which will be concluded eschatologically with God's perfecting of ourselves and creation. The eschatological perfectedness of creation and in particular of human beings is not a question of deification but about an embracing of our God-given humanity

(recreated in Christ), dependent, derived and distinct from God and whose perfectedness implies right relatedness with our fellow human beings and creation as well as with God. This participation can be understood as a participation in God not in the sense of a substantial sharing or crude ontological assimilation but in terms of relations with the persons of the Trinity (and with fellow human beings) which both correspond to and are distinct from the intra-trinitarian relations. Aspects of this correspondence-in-distinction have been highlighted.

Different dimensions of participation can be distinguished and related in all of this. We are given to participate in Christ's ontologically reconciled humanity but it remains for us to 'grow into' this new being. This is realised as we participate in Christ's response to the Father by pneumatologically dependent relations analogous and corresponding to the Son's relation to the Father and Jesus' relation to his neighbours. This brings a participation in Jesus' life, knowing and communion with the Father and the Spirit which is to be understood primarily as Christ's timely conformation of us to Himself through the Spirit.

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